

# METAPHYSICAL REALITY



PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS



D. R. KHASHABA

“METAPHYSICAL REALITY PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS.”

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“Would we not be making a reasonable defence, when we say that a true lover of knowledge, being by nature drawn towards communion with Reality, will not rest in the multiple that appear to be, but goes on and does not slacken or peter out in his love, until he grasps the very essence of each reality by that in his soul which it befits to grasp such—and it befits what is akin –, approaching and uniting with what has real being, begetting intelligence and reality, has understanding and true life and nourishment and thus is delivered of his labor, but not before then?” Plato, *Republic*, 490a-b.

“For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself” Plato, Epistle VII, 341c-d, tr. Glenn R. Morrow.

“I am the Truth.” Al Hallaj.

that false secondary power  
By which we multiply distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
That we perceive, and not that we have made.  
Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, II, 221-4.

“Philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thought.” A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*.

All ultimate reasons are in terms of aim at value. A dead nature aims at nothing.” A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*.

“Her vivid life has taught me that beauty, moral and aesthetic, is the aim of existence; and that kindness, and love, and artistic satisfaction are among its modes of attainment.” A. N. Whitehead (of his wife).

“Philosophical argument, strictly speaking, consists mainly of an endeavour to cause the reader to perceive what has been perceived by the author. The argument, in short, is not of the nature of proof, but of exhortation.” Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica*.

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## PREFACE

Philosophy has fallen into ill-repute by the hubris of her votaries. They proclaimed her Queen of Sciences and unwisely made on her behalf two impossible claims: (1) that she could give us knowledge of all things, and (2) that she was capable of reaching demonstrable, irrefragable truth. In so doing they were betraying the legacy of the wisest of all who philosophized, who declared that he knew nothing, and were untrue to the example of the sanest of all who wrote philosophically, who, to give expression to his profoundest insights, told *muthoi* and ‘likely tales.’

Ever since my first book, *Let Us Philosophize* which, due to a combination of unhappy circumstances, was only published in 1998 when I was past seventy, I have been saying in book after book and essay after essay that the present plight of philosophy is due to our mistaking the true nature of philosophical thinking. To revive philosophy, which is absolutely necessary if we are to live as human beings, we have to go back to those two remarkable Athenians who lived between the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The pity is that while the memory of the one and the works of the other have been miraculously preserved, the mission and the thought of those two gods have been misunderstood, misrepresented, and distorted.

The papers collected in this volume are basically and essentially an attempt to clarify and justify my interpretation of the mission of Socrates and of the philosophical vision of Plato. There are two main recurrent themes in this collection. In a number of papers I try to clarify what I, following Plato, mean by 'real' and 'reality.' In other papers I try to explain and emphasize the necessity of separating philosophy and science since confounding the two has done much harm to both. The first task is complicated by the fact that my usage of the terms 'real' and 'reality' clashes with common and current philosophical usage. I may have been unwise in deciding my terminology; I could perhaps have eased the problem by borrowing the Kantian *noumenon* and *noumenal* or by introducing a newfangled term carved out of Plato's *ousia* or *alêtheia*. But though my unwise choice has caused me much headache and exposed me to some ridicule, it may yet do some good if the shock of the unaccustomed usage should draw attention to what Plato, in common with poets and mystics, found more real than our humdrum reality, namely, our own inner reality.

Yet I do not ask the reader to accept my views or my interpretation. All I hope for is that what I present in these pages may provoke the reader to philosophize and develop her or his own position. That is the whole function and the whole worth of philosophy: the highest merit of any philosophical work is to prod us to philosophize.

D. R. Khashaba  
Cairo, Egypt, May 28, 2014.



# PLATO'S EXAMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

## INTRODUCTION

When Cornford published his translation with running commentary of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* he disclaimed responsibility for the title, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, under which the book appeared. He had good reason for this. If we want to find what Plato had to say about knowledge we have to go through all of Plato's works, especially the *Phaedo*, the *Meno*, and, above all, the *Republic*. The *Theaetetus* examines a 'theory of knowledge,' not Plato's however but one constructed on an imaginative development of Protagoras's doctrine that man is the measure of all things, combined with Heraclitus's doctrine of flux. The 'knowledge' subjected to examination there is not what Plato would normally deign to call 'knowledge,' *epistêmê*, but only 'opinion,' *doxa*, knowledge relating to the changeable things of the world.

Plato did not have a theory of knowledge as he did not have a 'theory of' anything for the simple reason that his approach to philosophy was not theoretical. Philosophy for Plato, the true

disciple of Socrates, was a way of life, or rather was life, the life proper to a human being. We cannot begin to understand Plato's position on knowledge until we see it as a dimension in his philosophy as a whole and see his philosophy as naturally stemming from Socrates' conception of his life-mission. At his trial Socrates sums up his mission in these words:

“Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one of you whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You my friend, ... are you not ashamed of heaping up the largest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: Yes, but I do care; then I shall not leave him nor let him go at once, but proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue in him but only says that he has, I shall reproach him with undervaluing the most precious, and overvaluing the less” (*Apology*, 29d-e, Jowett's translation).

Socrates thus solemnly declares his life-mission to be to exhort all persons, young and old, citizens and foreigners, to care for the health of their souls above everything else. In pursuit of his mission he went about questioning all who were willing to subject themselves to examination. He wanted them to see clearly that the proper and best life for a human being is the philosophical life, the life of intelligence. For Socrates perceived that we are only human inasmuch as we live in the realm formed by the ideas and ideals engendered by the mind in the mind. For good or for bad, living in an intelligible realm of ideas, ideals, values, beliefs and illusions is what characterizes us as human beings distinct from all other living beings. In examining his interlocutors Socrates wanted to help them look within their minds, to remove all that obstructs or obscures their internal vision, and to realize that it is only in their own minds that they

have their worth and their proper perfection and only there can they find reality. This was the basis and the significance of Socrates' crucial distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible.

This mission, this perception, and this distinction are dimensions or aspects of one integral whole, and the philosophic life is the expression of that whole; and from that springs the whole of Plato's philosophy. It is impossible to understand any element of Plato's philosophy unless we see that element in the whole. In the *Republic* he says: "he who sees things as a whole is philosophical, he who doesn't, isn't," *ho men gar sunoptikos dialektikos, ho de mê ou* (537c) – and this best characterizes his philosophy.

Thus what knowledge meant for Plato, what knowledge was for Plato, cannot be seen in separation from what philosophy was for Plato. For him philosophy was the perfection of life, human life as it can and should be. In the philosophic life thus understood understanding, virtue, and true being are inseparable aspects or dimensions of one thing. The central part of the *Republic*, from the latter part of Book V to the end of Book VII, which is not a digression as many scholars suppose, but is the heart and core of the *Republic* and the epitome of all philosophy, unfolds, like a flower from its bud, from an attempt to answer the question: Who is a philosopher? It culminates in the notion of the Form of the Good as the source of all understanding, all value, and all being, itself transcending all these. Hence, knowledge cannot be defined or confined to a theory, any more than virtue or reality can.

In the early dialogues of Plato, the elenctic dialogues, which we may call the 'What is x? dialogues,' the question 'What is knowledge?' is never posed. We meet with it for the first time in the *Theaetetus*. But we do meet with the word *epistêmê* regularly in those dialogues. We ask what this or that particular virtue is, and the examination reveals that, not only no particular virtue stands in separation from all other virtues, but also that no virtue stands in separation from *epistêmê* in some sense of the term.

This is regularly followed, not by the question ‘What, then, is knowledge?,’ but by the question, ‘What knowledge, knowledge of what?’ And that question takes us back to virtue, since the knowledge needed is found to be knowledge of the good. In the end we find that the ideas we have been examining have no meaning apart from that intelligence that brings them into being. Our worth and our reality are identical with this very activity of examining our ideas, our ideals, our minds, in short, of examining ourselves, and that is philosophy and philosophizing. . We can thus understand what Socrates meant when he said that his mission was to teach philosophy and what he meant when he said: “The unexamined life is not a life for a human being,” and why he found the Delphic precept *gnôthi sauton* to sum up his philosophical position.

In fact Socrates’ use of the term *epistêmê* was unfortunate, for it led to many complications and formal problems. But the insight behind the term was vital and necessary. It summed up the philosophy of Socrates. The characteristic excellence, *aretê*, of a human being is indifferently referred to by the words *nous* (mind), *sophia* (wisdom), *phronêsis* (reason, reasoning), *noêsis* (thought, thinking). I prefer to use the term ‘intelligence.’ That characteristic human excellence or perfection is one whole that can be manifested as wisdom, as reasonableness (*sôphrosunê*), as courage, as justice and so on.

This Socratic insight into the inner reality of a human being was the starting point and the foundation of the Platonic vision and of Plato’s doctrine of knowledge and reality, which were for Plato one thing: we are told of the Form of the Good that as the Sun does not only give the things seen their visibility, but is also the source of their generation and growth and nourishment, so the Good does not only give knowers the power of knowing, but gives them their very being, while it is itself beyond and above being (*Republic*, 509b). The whole of Plato’s philosophy is an unfolding, a development, of this basic Socratic insight. In this essay I intend to follow this unfolding and development.

The absurdity of the notion that in examining his interlocutors Socrates was seeking definitions would have been obvious to everybody were we not blinded to it by the dazzle of Aristotle's authority. In the dialogues we are sometimes given 'sample' definitions which are supposedly considered acceptable, and indeed, for specific practical purposes they would be acceptable. But we should be careful not to be misled by these. At a closer look we find them all of a kind that, when advanced as an answer to a Socratic 'What is x?' question, Socrates readily shows to be unsatisfactory. In the *Meno*, for instance, Socrates gives three such sample definitions, two definitions of shape and a definition of color. Shape is first defined as that which always accompanies colour. When Meno objects that this involves the undefined term color, Socrates offers the definition of shape as that in which a solid terminates. Meno insists on having a definition of color and Socrates offers a physical theory of color as a definition. Either of the definitions of shape may be good for practical purposes, and the 'definition' of color is of a kind that our modern scientists regularly advance and find acceptable. But none of these definitions tells us what the thing defined in itself is. In science, in mathematics, in jurisdiction, we have definitions that are good working tools. That is not what Socrates was after. Socrates sought understanding of the inner essence that can only be found in the self-evidence of the idea: the idea itself is the meaning and confers meaning on the particular instances.

I think that Aristotle's theory of abstraction—whatever its logical or methodological value may be—is psychologically flawed. We do not in practical experience first have the ideas of species out of which we derive the ideas of genera, but we first have the idea of a general form which is gradually partitioned into specific kinds. At least this is so on a primitive level. At an advanced stage we may form ideas of higher genera, not by abstraction however but by a creative act. First there are Hellenes and barbarians. The barbarians are separated into Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, and so on. Then we have the creative idea of Humanity and all peoples begin to be seen as humans. (I say, 'begin to be seen' because this, sadly, is a process that is far from

having been completed.) But this is not abstraction but the creative origination of a new whole and it only comes at a higher level of civilization. Primitively we have birds before we have hawks and sparrows.

There will be much reiteration in this essay. This is inevitable, necessary, and desirable. The Socratic-Platonic philosophy is a multi-dimensional, integrated whole. To understand one aspect of it, it must be seen within the whole. Hence, at every stage there will be recapitulation and anticipation, a look behind and a look ahead. I hope the reader will not find this irksome and will appreciate the necessity when she or he has gone through the whole.

Again, a reader might tell me that I am falsifying Plato's thought. I will not contest this. I have repeatedly stated that in discussing any philosopher—in particular Plato—my intention is not to expound or to seek to ascertain what that philosopher thought or believed, but to converse with the thinker in question to develop my own position. I may add that all original philosophy has been a falsification of the philosopher's predecessors, especially the one closest to that thinker. Aristotle falsified Plato. Leibniz and Spinoza falsified Descartes. Berkeley and Hume falsified Locke. The German Idealists falsified Kant. I describe my philosophy as an original version of Platonism. You are at liberty to understand of that what you will.

Another preliminary remark before I get to the philosophy of the *Phaedo* as the first leg of our study of Plato's examination of knowledge. We all speak now of what Socrates thought or said, now of what Plato thought or said. We have to admit that it is quite impossible for anyone to determine with certainty where Socrates' contribution ends and where Plato's begins. I have no desire to get involved in the Socrates-or-Plato conundrum. When I speak of Socrates I mean Plato's Socrates, the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. This Socrates may be the wildest of Plato's myths, but for me it is a myth that has more reality than any living person.

## I

In reading Plato we should never forget that Plato was above all a dramatist and that all of his dialogues are essentially dramatic works. The speeches of a Socrates, a Simmias, a Cebes, a Meno, a Protagoras, a Hippias, a Euthydemus, are part of the dramatic portrayal of the character, and it is grossly misleading to read them out of context. It is forgetfulness of this that is responsible for most of the nonsense spread by erudite scholars about the errors, fallacies, and contradictions in Plato's works. They fail to see that in every piece of dialogue Plato is presenting and developing a dramatic situation. Where is the philosophy then? The philosophy is in the vision intimated by the whole and that vision is not amenable to being contained in a fixed, final formulation of thought.

The vision of *nous* or *phronêsis* (reason, intelligence) as the specific excellence of a human being, and the consequent conception of philosophy as a way of life, is the core, the lifeblood, of Plato's philosophical position, and it receives its first rounded expression in the *Phaedo*. Most students of philosophy would unhesitatingly assert that the central theme of the *Phaedo* is the immortality of the soul, understood as personal survival. Regardless of whether Plato personally believed or did not believe in immortality thus understood, I suggest that the whole argument about immortality in the dialogue is the dramatic dressing through which Plato's profound insight into the reality of the soul and the proper life for a human being is intimated. To say it more briefly, the theme of the *Phaedo* is the divinity and eternity of the soul. (How I distinguish 'eternity' from 'immortality' will, I hope, become clear as we go along.) The message of the *Phaedo* is one with the mission to which Socrates devoted his whole life and finally elected to die rather than abandon it. That message or mission is a multi-dimensioned, integrated whole and to grasp that whole we can take any of the dimensions for our starting point. We can say that the *Phaedo* is about the divinity and eternity of the soul and we can with equal truth say that it is about the philosophical life. The congruity of these two statements will become evident in what follows.

At the very beginning of his report of the discussion Socrates and his friends were engaged in, Phaedo tells us that they were occupied as usual with philosophy (58a), and very early in the discussion it is said that a true philosopher is not concerned with the things of the body but is occupied as far as possible with the soul (64e). We have to keep in mind that for Socrates and Plato soul and mind are inseparable or rather identical. Socrates regularly refers to the soul as that in us which prospers by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong (at *Crito* 47e for instance). To do what is right is to be guided by reason and do what, upon reflection, appears to be best (*Crito* 46b).

At *Phaedo* 65a-b we are told that whereas the common run of people think that bodily pleasures are what make life worthwhile, a philosopher cares little for these but cares for the things of the mind (which at this point Plato sums up in the word *phronêsis*). We are further told that in the pursuit of knowledge the bodily senses are a hindrance rather than a help. The language here (as also in the statement that the philosopher practises dying) is perhaps due to Plato's ascetic temperament and to his being influenced by Pythagoreanism and has led to much misunderstanding. This is unfortunate because, in essence, these two statements intimate two vital Socratic positions that Plato embraced and developed in his mature philosophy. When we come to the 'autobiography' passage we will begin to see more plainly the essence of the Socratic position veiled by Plato's otherworldly language.

Indeed we begin to glimpse that vital insight when, at this point, Socrates brings in the intelligible ideas. For after affirming that, in seeking true knowledge, the mind turns away from the body and pursues its object by itself and in itself, he brings in the pure forms of the intelligible realm. In an extended argument, labelled by scholars as the Sticks and Stones argument, Plato is careful to affirm the metaphysical and logical priority of the intelligible forms to the things exemplifying or embodying the forms in the perceptible realm. I have discussed this at length in Chapter Five of *Plato: An Interpretation*. What I want to stress here is that for Socrates and Plato the reality of the intelligible



realm, the life of reason, and the good life, the proper life for a human being, are all integrally related.

The intelligible world of pure ideas—the realities of whose being we give account in our discussions, the equal and the beautiful and all that has true being—that intelligible world is always constant and uniform (78c-d). But the multiple particular instances in which these ideas are exemplified, are always subject to change and variation. So let us lay down two kinds of being, the visible (perceptible) and the invisible (imperceptible), *thômen oun ... duo eidê tôn ontôn, to men horaton, to de aides* (79a). The body clearly belongs to the class of the perceptible and the soul to that of the imperceptible. There is no argument and no proof here or in what follows. In what follows Plato oracularly conveys to the reader in poetic language, not the thought, not the conviction, but the experience, as only poetry can do, of the divinity and the eternity of the soul. Thus what is referred to by scholars as the argument from affinity does not argue, does not prove, but prophetically proclaims the divinity of the philosophical life, the life of intelligence, and the eternity of the soul.

When the mind (*psuchê*) makes use of the body in considering anything, it is dragged by the body into the changeable and is then led into error and is confused and dizzied and is drunken (79c). Here we have a re-affirmation of the Socratic position that the understanding sought by the philosopher is not to be found in any investigation of the phenomenal world, which position is more clearly stated in the ‘autobiography’ section of the *Phaedo* (see below) and is given graphic expression in the image of the Divided Line in the *Republic*.

When the soul (mind) all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure, always is (*aei on*), deathless, and constant, and being of a like nature to that, remains with that always, whenever it is possible for it to be by itself, and then it rests from wandering, and in the company of that, is constant, being in communion with what is constant; and it is this state that is called

*phronêsis* (79c-d). We will find this thought expressed again in similarly *geflügelte Worte* in the *Republic*, 490a-b.

Through the mystical language and imagery here we can clearly see that for Plato, as for Socrates, the forms and the soul are primarily the region of the intelligible or more specifically the plane of intelligent being.

To obviate a possible—and indeed common—misunderstanding, I have to stress that Plato does not deny or belittle the role of bodily perception in the knowledge of the external world. At 75a he plainly says: “And at the same time we are agreed also upon this point, that we have not and could not have acquired this notion of equality except by sight or touch or one of the other senses. I am treating them as being all the same” (tr. Tredennick). Thus even the idea of equality is occasioned in the mind by bodily perception. When we say that all knowledge (or, as I prefer to say, understanding) comes from the mind, we mean that bodily impressions remain dumb and meaningless until they are clothed in intelligible forms conferred by the mind. Only then do the dumb impressions become meaningful perceptions as Kant also affirmed.

Though Plato’s language apparently runs counter to what we now take for granted, that all knowledge is empirically based, and that pure reason—reason divorced of experience and unaided by experience—has been shown to yield no valid knowledge and to lead to no truth, this rests on a misunderstanding which will be cleared when we consider the message of the ‘autobiography’ and when, further on, we grasp the outlook on knowledge developed in the central part of the *Republic*.

In the *Phaedo* we have the first clear statement of what is commonly referred to as Plato’s ‘theory of Forms.’ This so-called ‘theory’ of Forms flows from the division of all things into two kinds, the intelligible and the perceptible. Socrates first emphatically affirms that we have such ideas as justice, beauty, strength, and so on. We can find beautiful things in the world, but the idea of beauty itself cannot be found in the world. It is in fact,

as Socrates says later on in the dialogue, in virtue of the idea of beauty that beautiful things are seen to be beautiful.

Plato's attempts to find a suitable linguistic formula for relating the perceptible to the intelligible have been subject to misunderstanding and misrepresentation and the misrepresentation was given support by Aristotle who failed completely to grasp the true significance of Plato's conception of Forms. Thus while Plato plainly tells us that he does not know how to express satisfactorily the relation between the Forms and their exemplifications, erudite scholars have filled tomes discussing Plato's 'theories' of participation and of the separate existence of Forms. And when in the first part of the *Parmenides* all these modes of expression are shown to be unsatisfactory, we are told that Plato abandoned his 'theory of Forms,' not seeing that the intelligible as the abode of reality, and as all the reality we know, remains to the last the heart and core of Plato's philosophical outlook.

In the philosophic life as the proper life for a human being, as the specific excellence of a human being, are united virtue, understanding, and reality, since it is only in the intelligible realm and in the mind that is the fount and home of the intelligible realm that we have immediate cognizance of what is real, all that is outside the mind being nothing but fleeting shadow. For Plato *to on*, *ousia*, *alêtheia* (not 'truth' but 'reality') were interchangeable terms and applied solely to the intelligible Forms.

At *Phaedo* 92d Simmias, having been induced by Socrates to abandon the doctrine of the soul as a harmony as being incompatible with the doctrine of knowledge as reminiscence, says that his acceptance of the prior being of the soul, before it enters the body, rests on its having those realities, the forms of what truly is. I regard both the doctrine of reminiscence and the doctrine of the prior being of the soul as insightful myths, the first intimating that all understanding stems from the mind and the second intimating the divinity and eternity of the *psuchê* (soul, mind).

The final argument for immortality in the *Phaedo* is the flimsiest of all. It is the kind of verbal jugglery that Socrates again and again takes to pieces in the elenctic dialogues. Scholars who take it seriously, whether accepting or rejecting it, are insulting Plato's intelligence. On the face of it, it applies to the soul as the principle of life, not as the principle of intelligence and goodness. If it is taken to prove the immortality of a human being, we would have to say that it also proves the immortality of the meanest bug. If Plato had been blind to that, the humblest of his students would have pointed it out to him. I reiterate: Plato was writing as a poet, as an artist; his aim was to produce an effect, to inspire a vision, not to convey a factual truth.

## II

Cebes had advanced an argument to show that the immortality of the soul was not conclusively demonstrated. Socrates recapitulates Cebes's argument (95b-e) then says to him, You have raised the whole problem of becoming and perishing. Then, instead of countering Cebes's argument he proposes to recount his own experience of wrestling with the problem and the conclusion he came to. At this point Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates an 'autobiographical' account (95e-101e) which, in my view, is of the utmost importance for our understanding of the true nature of philosophical thinking, but the significance of which has curiously escaped students of philosophy, even renowned Platonists. What Socrates goes on to say means, in fact, that no investigation of things outside the mind can give us an intelligible explanation of becoming and perishing. This is the lesson that philosophers and scholars, beginning with Plato's own students and associates at the Academy, and on top of them Aristotle, have failed to grasp, with grievous consequences for philosophical thought throughout two and a half millennia. I have commented on this important passage of the *Phaedo* more than once before but do not hesitate to do so again because I believe

that unless we grasp its message the true nature and function of philosophy will be lost to us and the deplorable contest between science and philosophy and theology will continue interminably.

Socrates relates how as a youth he was, as we might have expected, interested in the investigations of his predecessors into the causes of natural things. He soon discovered that such investigations have nothing to tell him about the questions he was most concerned about. He found out that those who search for causes in the natural world grope in the dark, and, grasping the perceptible conditions of becoming, misname that ‘cause.’ They do not look for the true cause behind the process (99b-c). When Socrates found out that it was vain to seek answers for the kind of questions that concerned him by investigating things, he decided to take refuge in reason, *eis tous logous*, and there seek the reality of things (99d-e). This is the radical separation of science, which gives us knowledge of things, and philosophy, which gives us understanding of ourselves, a separation which both our philosophers and our scientists have ignored to the harm of both philosophy and science. When Cebes says he couldn’t grasp fully what Socrates was saying, Socrates explains:

“Here is what I have to say; it is nothing new, but is what I have never ceased to say both earlier and in the discussion we have now been through. I will try therefore to explain to you the kind of cause that I have made up for myself. I will go back to what I have always been harping on, and will begin from there, assuming there is the Beautiful in itself, and the Good, and the Big, and all the others. If you allow me those and admit the being of those, I hope, out of those, to explain to you ‘the cause’ ...” (100b).

(In translating this and similar passages translators use ‘exist’ and ‘existence’ for Plato’s *einai*, for which I usually use ‘real’ and ‘reality.’ Here, keeping as close as possible to the original, I have avoided these terms, using ‘is’ and ‘being.’)

Following Socrates’ example, we will have to go back again to his first principles. For Socrates here plainly tells us that the

kind of causation he was seeking and finally found in ideas after abandoning the search in outer things, this kind of causation which contented him, he tells us, was founded on his old distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible and the separation of these two realms. Socrates is telling us that answers to philosophical questions—questions about meaning and ideals and values—are not to be found in the external world but only in our own mind.

In explaining why he renounced the investigation of causes in the things (*en tois ergois*) and decided to confine himself to the investigation of causes in the ideas (*en tois logois*), Socrates says that he used to think that a man's body grows by the addition of flesh to flesh and bone to bone. Naïve as the illustration is, we can see that this is indeed the way science objectively 'explains' growth. A seed grows into a tree, the tree bears fruit. Science tells us how this comes about, how elements from the soil, water, sunlight, all combine to produce the plant and the fruit. But this does not reveal the secret of life. Science can only describe externally the stages of the process and break it up into finer and finer stages. We seek the origin of life and can only describe elements out of which living things come to be. By the idea of life we sort out things into living and lifeless, but life remains a mystery. It is only the idea in our mind that has meaning; outside the mind there is no meaning; all things outside the mind are dumb. It may sound like a paradox to say that we only understand an ultimate idea when we confess it to be a mystery. We create ideas that generate for us a realm of intelligibility that has its whole meaning and its whole reality in our mind, our mind being ultimately the only reality we know. The only reasonable thing we can say about ultimate Reality is that we can only think of it as akin to the one reality we know. As I have put it elsewhere: the God of philosophy is the God we create, not the God that has allegedly created us. And once again, to obviate a misunderstanding that I have met with again and again, when I speak of philosophical reality as the only reality we know, I am definitely not denying the 'reality' of things as commonly understood; I am only proposing that 'realists' permit me to

speak of my reality as reality and to speak of their ‘reality’ and ‘realities’ as existence and existents. This is only a matter of terminology; my terminology may be unfortunate, but it does not justify sending me to a mental asylum on the ground that I deny the ‘reality’ of things that all sane people acknowledge.

Again, when a taller person stood by a shorter one, Socrates says, he used to think the taller one exceeded the shorter by a head. To deal with things in the world we have of course to measure things, employing agreed units of measurement. But without the idea of more and less, of greater and smaller, we would never make the comparison. The two persons would simply be two shapes reflected in our eyes or brain or what you will. The relation taller and shorter is entirely a creation of the human mind and only has meaning in the mind.

Our philosophers find it difficult to understand this crucial part of the ‘autobiography’ because their objectively oriented thinking will not admit that all meaning and all understanding comes from the mind. They continue to seek meaning and understanding in nature and will always be baffled because they are looking in the wrong place. All reality is in the mind because the mind is our whole reality. Thus Socrates further declares: “It seems to me that if anything is beautiful other than the beautiful in itself, it is beautiful through no other thing than that it partakes of the beautiful in itself, and likewise all other things” (100c). As I would put it, a thing is beautiful because the mind clothes it in beauty. This is true and it is very important to understand it, for this crucial and seminal part of the ‘autobiography’ discloses the secret of the Socratic elenchus, where the *aporia* it invariably leads to is intended to reveal the reality and self-evidence of the ideas bred in and by the mind, the mind being the locus and fount of ‘realities’; the mind itself is the final reality we arrive at, as the *Republic* will show. Plato clouds this essential insight in the final argument for immortality that follows the ‘autobiography.’ The meaning, the understanding that we discover in our own mind does not give us knowledge of any actuality. The eternity of the soul that the *Phaedo* beautifully reveals is a reality that has its whole being and its whole meaning in the mind and nowhere

else. It grants us to live eternity transiently in the here and now. We live *sub specie aeternitatis* while we live; when we die 'we' are no more, but are part of the All.

In posing the question why things come to be and pass away, Socrates sets out the fundamental question of all metaphysics. ('How' is a totally different question; I will clarify and emphasize this radical distinction in what follows) Socrates did not pose the question why there are things at all, why there is anything rather than nothing. This is an unanswerable question; it points to the ultimate mystery of Being, before which we can only stand in awe. (The presumed answers attempted by scientists, philosophers, and theologians are all equally entirely inane.) The line of philosophers from Thales to Anaxagoras and further on to Leucippus and Democritus tried to answer the question how things come to be and pass away. Others, Xenophanes perhaps and Heraclitus and Parmenides were more concerned with the Why question, though the distinction was not clear to anyone of either group. Aristotle belonged definitely to the How school. In his *Generazione et Corruptione* he sets out the kinds of factors into which we may analyze the becoming of a thing, or out of which we may construct the thing. This is all that science as objective investigation of things can do. Socrates could not know of Aristotle; he died fifteen years before the Stagirite was born; and Aristotle, though he must have read the *Phaedo*, passed over the 'autobiography,' as our own modern scholars do, without comprehension.

It was Socrates who first saw clearly that the investigation of things in nature may tell us how things come to be but can never give us an answer to any Why question. 'Why' points to purpose, and science methodically excludes purpose in its investigations: even Aristotle's final end is an abstraction, a construct arrived at after the event. We know living, active purpose, know it immediately and indubitably, in one place only: within ourselves. Socrates knows that he is seated in his prison awaiting execution not because the laws of physics and anatomy and physiology and chemistry contrive to produce that particular posture and bodily setting but because his principles of honor and loyalty and



truthfulness make him choose to face death rather than be untrue to what he announced at his trial, that he would accept death rather than comply with the State's injunction to cease philosophizing.

The distinction first drawn clearly by Socrates between the investigation of things and the investigation of ideas defines the boundaries between science which gives us useful knowledge of outer things and philosophy which gives us insight into our own reality. The insight behind this distinction was developed by Plato—despite some wavering and some confusion—into a philosophy in which understanding (I cede 'knowledge' to science) and reality and value are one. This development is given its maturest and most integrated expression in the central part of the *Republic*. But before we go to the *Republic*, there is another vital insight revealed to in the 'autobiography' which was also fundamental in the formation of Plato's philosophical outlook and which has also been overlooked or misunderstood and distorted by students of philosophy, which we have to consider at this point.

### III

The insight disclosed by Socrates in the 'autobiography' is so original, so profound and profoundly simple, that it has escaped the wise and the erudite; even Plato's account of it is somewhat confused and the illustrations given by 'Socrates' are not all as helpful as one could wish. But the insight itself is already evident in essence, though never explicitly expressed, in the early elenctic dialogues, which invariably begin as the search for the meaning of some idea and as invariably end in apparent failure and open *aporia* (perplexity). As I see it and as I have tried to show in many of my writings, the *aporia* is the whole end and purpose of the Socratic examination. It is intended to lead the interlocutor to see that the idea is itself the meaning and is what gives meaning; that it can never be defined in terms of anything

outside the idea itself; that it can only be understood in its own self-evidence in its own home and living abode: the mind. This was never explicitly expressed in the early dialogues, but is plainly disclosed in the ‘autobiography’ in Socrates’ ‘foolish’ assertion that it is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. (This was independently glimpsed by Wittgenstein after much travail.)

Concluding the ‘autobiographical’ account there is a passage of special significance, of which I quote this opening excerpt: “Then you would not accept it if someone said that adding one to one is the cause of the becoming of two, or that in dividing the one the division is the cause. You would protest loudly that you know of no way how a thing becomes other than by partaking of the proper reality of that of which it partakes, and that you know no other cause of the becoming of two other than partaking of duality (*tên tês duados metaschesin*), and that what is to become two must partake of this, and what is to become one must partake of unity” (101c).

It is our ideas, ideas created in and by the mind, that give things their meaning, their character, their essence. A tree is not a tree until I see it as a tree. Kant said it explicitly in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (pp. xix-xx), but it was so shocking to the erudite that he had to veil the obscene nudity of the thought in the second edition.

We say that one and one make two, but in the outer world they are only one and one – not even that, for the ‘and’ is not in nature. it is decidedly a creation of the mind. One and one are only two for us, in the mind. That is the meaning of Socrates’ asserting that the two is two by Twoness. This is brought out beautifully in a passage of Whitehead’s *Modes of Thought* which I cannot refrain from quoting in full:

“I remember an incident proving that at least some squirrels have not crossed this borderline of civilization. We were in a charming camp situated amidst woodland bordering a Vermont lake. A squirrel had made its nest in our main sitting room, placing it in a hole in brickwork around the fireplace. She came in and out to her young ones, ignoring the presence of the human family. One day she decided that her family had grown up beyond the nursery stage. So, one by one, she carried them out to the edge of the woodland. As I remember across the years, there were three children. But when the mother had placed them on the rock outside, the family group looked to her very different from its grouping within the nest. She was vaguely disturbed, and ran backwards and forwards two or three times to make quite sure that no young squirrel had been left behind. She was unable to count, nor had she identified them by christening them with names. All she knew was that the vague multitude on the rock seemed very unlike the vague multitude in the nest. Her family experiences lacked the perception of the exact limitation imposed by number. As a result she was mildly and vaguely disturbed. If the mother could have counted, she would have experienced the determinate satisfaction of a job well done in the rearing of three children; or in the case of loss, she would have suffered vivid pain from the absence of a determinate child. But she lacked adequate experience of any precise form of limitation” (*Modes of Thought*, 1938, pp.77-78).

Lengthy as has been my comment on the ‘autobiographical’ passage of the *Phaedo*, I may not have done enough to clarify sufficiently these two related ideas (1) of the radical distinction between scientific thinking yielding knowledge and philosophical thinking leading to understanding, and (2) of the self-evidence of ideas in the mind as the sole source of meaning and meaningfulness. When we look into the Platonic development of these insights as expounded in the central part of the *Republic* they will, I hope, gain some clarity. I also hope it may not be too

much of me to ask the reader to look at chapters Five and Seven of my *Plato: An Interpretation*, and also “Philosophy as Prophecy” and “Knowledge and Understanding” in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*.

Socrates sums up the philosophy of the *Phaedo* in the beautiful words concluding the *muthos* of the ‘other world’:

“Wherefore, I say, let a man be of good cheer about his soul, who, having cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him and working harm rather than good, has sought after the pleasures of knowledge; and has arrayed the soul, not in some foreign attire, but in her own proper jewels, temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth—in these adorned she is ready to go her journey to the world below, when her hour comes” (114d-115a).

#### IV

The ‘autobiography’ closes (101d-e) with an exposition of the method of hypotheses (introduced in the *Meno*, mentioned again in the *Phaedrus*, and referred to briefly earlier at 100a). This can be misleading. The method alluded to at 100a refers to the Socratic investigation *en tois logois*, which is a free exploration of pure ideas leading to the disclosure of the self-evidence of ideas. The method suggested at 101d-e may be confused with the modern empirical method of investigation. At best this may be taken as no more than a re-affirmation of what we were told earlier about reasoning by ideas, through ideas, and this can only be properly understood in the light of what the *Republic* will tell us about philosophizing. The parallel passage in the *Republic* may also be open to the same possibility of confusion.

In the *Phaedo* there is a clear allusion to the ‘reminiscence doctrine,’ introduced in the *Meno*, that knowledge is recollection,

and to the demonstration Socrates gives there by leading Meno's 'boy,' simply by questioning, to find the true answer to the problem of doubling the area of a square. This is commonly taken as evidence that the *Meno* was an earlier dialogue than the *Phaedo*. As generally with the dialogues of Plato, the *Meno* is not confined to a single theme. Among other things, it contains three points that are of relevance to the discussion of Plato's examination of knowledge. (1) the 'doctrine' of knowledge (or rather learning) as recollection; (2) the distinction of knowledge and opinion; (3) the suggestion of the method of search by hypotheses. The hypothesis method I see as one of Plato's many excursions into methodology, such as his experimentations with Collection and Division. These may be of interest and value to the student of logic and scientific method but otherwise do not enlighten us as to the nature or meaning of knowledge. The distinction of knowledge and opinion is one that Plato will further develop in the *Republic* and is vital for our understanding of Plato's position, as I will try to show in what follows. The 'reminiscence doctrine' is, in my view, a myth that gives expression to Socrates' insight that all understanding springs from the mind. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates introduces the *maieusis* metaphor and some scholars have considered this as a departure from the reminiscence doctrine. I only see it as another way of expressing what Socrates had always been showing, or rather practicing, in the elenctic dialogues, when he helped his interlocutors give birth to the ideas germinating in their minds. I will not discuss the *Meno* further in the present essay.

## V

I have written repeatedly on the central part of the *Republic* (from 472a in Book V to the end of Book VII) and did so extensively in two chapters of *Plato: An Interpretation*, Chapter Six, "Knowledge and Reality," and Chapter Seven, "The Argument of the *Republic*." Here I am giving an edited version with omissions and additions, of the shorter of these, Chapter Six,

but I hope the reader will find it worthwhile to look up the fuller treatment in Chapter Seven.

For Socrates, ideas were all that mattered. They were what made human beings human and made human life worthwhile. He did not raise the question of their metaphysical status. For Plato, ideas were all that was real; they were all that was knowable: for, following the venerable Parmenides, he held that the intelligible and the real are one, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai* (fragment 5).

Hence, for Plato, knowledge and reality are two sides of a single coin, two dimensions of one thing. More often than not he uses the word *alêtheia*—usually translated ‘truth’—to mean reality. As often he uses *phusis* to mean, not phenomenal nature, the things we see and touch, but the reality beyond that. For him *alêtheia*, *ousia*, *to on*, *phusis* are, to say the least, closely related.

We get to the metaphysical core of the *Republic* when Socrates, having affirmed that there will be no respite for human society until philosophers become rulers or rulers espouse philosophy, and his audience being incredulous, he tries to explain who is a philosopher. We are told that a philosopher is one who is enamored of wisdom, *Sophia*, and desires all knowledge, *pantos mathêmatos* (475b-c). But an important distinction is introduced: not all curiosity is love of wisdom (475d). And the distinction rests on a fundamental principle and goes to the heart of the question of knowledge and reality. For true knowledge is not knowledge of particular instances but of the essence of things. For, as we learn from the *Phaedo*, all actual things, things in the outer world, the objective world, are necessarily imperfect and inconstant and cannot supply the true content of knowledge. As we learn from both the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, things can be the occasion of knowledge, but are never the source of knowledge. So we begin the quest for the philosopher, for reality, and for goodness by going back to the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible.

So Socrates designates genuine philosophers as *tous tês alêtheias philotheamonas*, those that love to behold *alêtheia* – not

truth, which always has an extraneous reference, but that which truly is, which has true being. We see at once that for Plato the question of knowledge and the question of reality cannot be parted, for, as we can learn from the earliest dialogues, intelligence is the one reality in which we can find rest. By ‘intelligence’ I mean to indicate the mind, not as an entity, not as a faculty, not as an active something, but as the activity itself, the creative activity, *phronêsis*.

Those who busy themselves with the phenomenal do not enjoy insight into the reality of things (476b). Once again we find ourselves reminded of the lesson of the *Phaedo*: the farther we withdraw away from what is given in experience and dwell on what is bred in the mind, the closer we are to the higher reaches of *epistêmê* (intelligence, understanding, reason) and to communion with reality. Reality for Plato is a vision, a spiritual experience, a state of perfection we attain, not the product of a syllogistic process we perform, not the ‘highest’ (most shadowy and most vacuous) abstraction in a series of abstractions. In 476d Plato opposes *gnômê*, knowledge of the intelligible forms, to *doxa*, knowledge of the sensible things as in the *Meno* he opposes *epistêmê* to *doxa*; but Plato never sticks long to any fixed terminological usage.

In 476e we have the question: *ho gignôskôn gignôskei ti ê ouden*; he who knows, does he know something or nothing? Plato wanted to affirm and to emphasize the reality of the intelligible. What follows in this central part of the *Republic* shows that, for Plato, the intelligible is all that is real, and that that reality is radically distinct from all that is tangible and visible and objectively given. That Plato calls the real ‘something’—as, in the early dialogues, justice is affirmed to be ‘something that is’—, is a linguistic necessity. But those for whom nothing is ‘real’ but what can be seen or touched or otherwise handled, took ‘is something’ to mean ‘is an existent in the extended universe,’ thereby negating the very essence of the real and giving rise to the controversies and the misunderstanding that have been raging from the day of Aristotle to the present day. Next Socrates asks: *poteron on ê ouk on*; which simply asks whether the intelligible

is or is not and we are content at this point to say that the intelligible is. But later on we will find that only the intelligible truly is and that the sensible cannot be truly said to be.

The Greek word *einai* ('to be') can be a trap to the unwary. In the context of Plato's philosophy, this word should present no difficulty: *to on* for Plato always refers to the real which is one with the intelligible. Except for the common, non-technical, uses of the verb, which are inescapable, Plato never ascribes being without qualification to the multiple, mutable, perceptible things in the world, which are no more than images and shadows of true being. Again, except for the common idiomatic use of *einai* to mean 'it is so,' 'that's right,' which is of no philosophical significance, Plato does not use the word to mean truth as conformity with an actual state of affairs. For Plato, *alêtheia* is not 'truth' as we commonly understand it, but genuine being, reality.

Even though Plato's language may often be strongly suggestive of the independent 'existence' of the forms, I maintain that this is not a necessary feature of a meaningful doctrine of forms fully in accord with Socrates' and Plato's basic conceptions and outlook. When we say that the forms 'exist apart from' the perceptible things, that is an affirmation simply of the distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible. To overcome the ensuing confusion I introduce the opposition of existence to reality, which I regard as a radical and necessary distinction.

Glaucon retorts, *pôs gar an mê on ge ti gnôsthêie*;, how can what is not be known? (477a), and Plato means us here to take both *on* and *gnôsthêie* in a strong sense, as is evident from the following speech: *to men pantelôs on pantelôs gnôston, mê on de mêdamêi pantêi agnôston*, what wholly is is wholly knowable, what is not is in no way knowable. When in the *Theaetetus* we come to deal with knowledge in a weaker sense, knowledge of the sensible, we are faced with the same question: whatever we know in some sense must also in some sense be. But there we are moving on an altogether different plane of being; we are in the



sphere of belief and opinion and deal with things that are halfway between being and not-being. The 'Divided Line' in Book VI articulates this principle and the Cave allegory in Book VII gives it graphic expression, but the gist is here: what wholly is is wholly knowable and only what wholly is is knowable in the fullest sense.

If a thing is such as to both be and not be, it stands halfway between being and not-being. To being corresponds knowledge; to not-being corresponds ignorance; to what is halfway between being and not-being there must correspond a condition halfway between knowledge and ignorance (477a-b). Plato had already enunciated this position in the *Meno* where he designated the middle condition as *doxa*. All so-called knowledge of the particular and the sensible is not true knowledge, is not the knowledge that gives insight, but is belief and opinion, not only because it is uncertain, but primarily because it is 'knowledge' of a phantom world. Knowledge of the extraneously given can never shine with the inner light, the self-evidence of reality. This is something which our modern world which owes all its glories in and all it is proud of to objective science finds it difficult to absorb. To appease them I assure them that Plato's philosophy takes away nothing from the achievements of modern science, and to placate them still further. in my terminology I leave them all 'knowledge' and claim for philosophy all 'understanding.'

For Plato, knowledge is only to be accounted knowledge when it is infallible (477e). Why is that so? Because, as Socrates well knew, truth shines in its own light; the creation of the mind is a reality in its own right; it is by beauty that beautiful things are beautiful; you cannot prove that a thing is beautiful, but can only see it as beautiful. Socrates could not prove that it is better to suffer wrong than to perpetrate wrong: he lived that truth, and in living that truth lived in reality. Knowledge is infallible, not because it is demonstrable or provable in any way; not because it is the result of a valid inferential process, but because it is its own evidence.

The concept of the world of becoming as the domain of belief and opinion Plato finds so important and so novel, that he goes to great length to drive it home, elaborating and qualifying over the space of two full Stephanus pages (477a-478e). The primary end of this passage is to affirm the distinction between the perceptible particular and the intelligible idea. We can say that the Socratic distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible develops, in the hands of Plato, into the distinction between *doxa* and *epistêmê*.

We therefore relegate the multiple, the mutable, the perceptible, to a position *metaxu ousias te kai tou mê einai*, between being and not-being (479c), and there they rest, till Plato returns to them in the *Theaetetus* when, late in life, he finds the things of the world calling for some attention on the theoretical level. When Plato concludes that, of all those who busy themselves with the actual particulars (the sanctified facts of empiricists) *doxazein phêsomen hapanta, gignôskein de hôn doxazousin ouden*, “we may say that they opine but have no knowledge of what they opine about,” he is re-affirming the position adopted by Socrates in the ‘autobiographical’ section of the *Phaedo*, where he says *edoxe dê moi chrênai eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tèn alêtheian*, “it occurred to me I should take refuge in reason and there seek the reality of things” (*Phaedo*, 99e).

## VI

In 486a, almost incidentally, Plato drops two fiery phrases characterizing the philosopher as reaching out for the whole and the all, and as beholding all time and all being – words which have given inspiration to all philosophers of an idealist temper ever since. For the only philosophically viable sense of reality is perfection. The problem which starts genuine philosophical thinking on its course is: How can the imperfect, the finite, the determinate, the particular, be? For only perfect

being seems immediately intelligible. The equation of reality and perfection is the ground principle of Platonic metaphysics.

Then, like a flash of lightning, Plato dazzles us with a passage of no more than 76 inspired words (490a-b), which, to my mind, encapsulates the essence of all true metaphysics:

“Would we not be making a reasonable defence, when we say that a true lover of knowledge, being by nature drawn towards communion with Reality, will not rest in the multiple that appear to be, but goes on and does not slacken or peter out in his love, until he grasps the very essence of each reality by that in his soul which it befits to grasp such—and it befits what is akin –, approaching and uniting with what has real being, begetting intelligence and reality, has understanding and true life and nourishment and thus is delivered of his labor, but not before then?”

The passage is necessarily mystical in tone, for philosophical understanding in its highest reaches is essentially a mystic experience, being an immediate awareness of the perfection of being in the integrity of creative intelligence. It is necessary to lay stress here on two essential points. It is (1) by becoming united with reality, and (2) by engendering reason and real essences, that a philosopher attains understanding. Philosophical understanding is at no point passive; it is through and through a creative act, and it is that creative act itself that is the reality that the philosopher comes to behold and to understand. That the passage quoted above is reminiscent of the *Phaedo* passage (79c-d) outlined earlier (under # I) and consonant with the description of the ascent to the highest Form of Beauty in the *Symposium* should convince us that this mystic experience is for Plato the alpha and the omega of the philosophic endeavor. This is also confirmed by the description of the philosophic vision in the *Phaedrus* and in Epistle VII.

A person whose thought is truly directed towards true being, beholds a realm of constant realities, where no injustice is

incurred or suffered, where order and reason reign, and lives in harmony with and in the likeness of those realities (500b-c). Once again we see how, for Plato, philosophical understanding, reality, and the good life are inseparable. Again when he speaks of *to phusei dikaion kai kalon kai sôphron*, what is in nature or by nature just and beautiful and reasonable (501b), we see how, as often, for Plato, *phusis* does not mean the phenomenal world, nature as commonly understood, but the world of supra-temporal reality or ideal reality.

Then when Plato enters on the question of the manner in which and the studies and practices by which the philosophical nature is to be readied for its great work, we have the most explicit treatment of the question how knowledge stands to reality and to goodness. The last ten pages or so of Book VI (502c-511e) therefore give us the gist of Plato's position on this crucial philosophical problem.

Socrates says we must test our would-be philosopher's capacity for the greatest of studies, and Adeimantus puts forward the explosive question, What do you mean by the greatest of studies? (503e-504a). Here we get to the core of the metaphysical problem; the following eight Stephanus pages, 504a-511e, constitute the epitome of all metaphysical philosophy.

Is there, Adeimantus asks, a study greater than that of justice and the other virtues? (504d) Socrates affirms simply, bluntly, blankly that the highest knowledge is the Form of the Good, *hê tou agathou idea megiston mathêma*, (I purposely follow Plato's text in not saying 'is knowledge of' as translators commonly do, 'correcting' Plato's construction) and that we do not know this sufficiently. He also says we have been saying this all the time (504e-505a). Are these empty words? Is this not what Socrates in all his discourses had been leading up to? All virtue is one and is one with knowledge. And when we ask, What knowledge?, the answer is invariably, Knowledge of the good. And when we ask, But what is the good?, the only answer we get is that the good is knowledge. The good is what we arrive at when we follow unhampered reason to the seat of active, creative intelligence.

Plato's words here are bland and vacuous when taken in separation, but are full of meaning when viewed as the apex of the dialectic quest for the meaning of true being, of goodness, and of intelligence as inseparable aspects of one whole, one reality.

So we are told that those who say that the good is intelligence, *phronêsis*, cannot say what intelligence is, but are obliged in the end to say that it is intelligence of the good (505b). In saying this Plato plainly points to the Socratic quest, and Plato is consistent with the totality of his thought and outlook when he maintains that it is only in the living process of dialectic that we gain an insight into reality and glimpse the Form of the Good.

Again we sense a touch of mysticism where Plato refers to the Good as that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all it does, divining its reality but not able to grasp adequately what it is (505d-e). Perhaps at this point I have to ward off a possible misunderstanding. I refer to mystic feeling and mystic language in speaking of Plato's approach to reality. The mysticism meant here is in full accord with rationality. The experience is ineffable only in the sense that the immediacy of the feeling cannot be communicated; but it can be described and can be interpreted.

When Socrates is pressed by both Adeimantus and Glaucon to say what he thinks the good is, he demurs, saying that it is beyond him to say at the moment what he thinks the good is, but that he will tell them of an offspring of the good that is very much like it, *ekgonos te tou agathou ... kai homoiotatos ekeinôi* (506d-e). He could not do otherwise. True philosophy is not a body of knowledge but a way of life, and the highest 'knowledge' attainable through that life is an illumination that can only be engendered in the pursuit itself. I will return to this point of the ineffability of the Good later on in this essay when I deal with the problem of dialectic.

It is very significant that Plato finds it necessary at this point (507b-c), as a prelude to saying what he has to say about the

highest reality within our reach, to recall the root conception of the distinction between the multiple actual instances of any character and the unique intelligible form of that character, which is (= has true being); the multiple being perceptible but not intelligible, while the forms are intelligible but not perceptible. This reminder was necessary and indispensable because the highest reality accessible to us, symbolized by the Sun as the child of the Good, is none other than the seat and fount of the intelligible realm, the mind as active, creative intelligence, giving birth to all forms in which and through which alone the things of the world have meaning.

So Socrates, finding it not possible to give an articulate account of what the Good is, introduces a simile. The Sun is the offspring and the like of the Good, standing, in the visible sphere, to sight and the visible, in the same relation as the Good stands, in the intelligible realm, to mind and the intelligible. As the eye sees clearly only by the light of day, but dimly by nocturnal lights, so the soul (mind), where reality and true being (*alêtheia te kai to on*) shine, understands and knows and is endowed with reason, but when it turns to the darkling region of becoming, the mutable and the perishing, it opines and wavers and is not certain (507c-508c). Here we already have the gist of ‘the Divided Line’ which, a little further on, is given in a more detailed but schematic form.

What gives reality to the things known and the power of knowing to the knower, is the Form of the Good. Being the source of knowledge and of reality (*aitian d’ epistêmês ousan kai alêtheias*), knowledge and reality both being beautiful, it is yet other than these and more beautiful. Just as light and sight are akin to the Sun but are not the Sun, so knowledge and reality (*epistêmên de kai alêtheian*) are akin to the Good but are not the Good, for the Good is far above these in excellence (508e-509a).

Once again the mystic fervor and the mystic language are evident and with good reason. For the Form of the Good is the idea of perfection, the only viable metaphysical conception of Reality. To have a conception of Reality on the metaphysical

plane at all is to have a conception of what the most perfect being is. Before Plato and after Plato many thinkers offered their conceptions of ultimate Reality, of the most perfect being. But it was Plato who saw that, though we cannot know Reality objectively, our idea of Reality is the reality we live in and that confers reality on all the contents of our experience. That is why I think that we may rightly consider Plato as the father of metaphysics. (The term ‘metaphysics’ of course was not known to Plato, nor to Aristotle, but “that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet,” as Shakespeare assures us.)

And as the Sun does not only give the things seen the capability of being seen, but is the source of their generation and growth and nourishment, so the Good does not only give knowers the power of knowing, but gives them their very being, while it is itself beyond and above knowledge and being (509b). It is clear that we are concerned here with the ground and origin of all being. Why does Plato insist again and again that it is beyond and above all being and all truth and all knowledge? Because ultimate Reality, perfect Being, cannot be confined to or identified with any finite or determinate actuality. We will return to this crucial principle when we deal with the nature of dialectic. (This is a lesson further embodied in the *Parmenides*, a lesson that Plotinus absorbed but that not many others have been able to grasp.)

After all that has been said so far, ‘the Divided Line’ will be seen as no more than a graphic illustration of what we could well have learned from the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*. And when Socrates in preparing the ground for presenting the Divided Line simile asks, “So now you have these two notions, the visible, the intelligible?” (*all’ oun echeis tauta ditta eidê, horaton, nôêton*; 509d), it should be obvious that the Line, the Cave, the Sun simile, and all that Plato says in this central part of the *Republic* that we are dealing with, is already implicit in the Socratic distinction of the perceptible and the intelligible.

## VII

The gist of ‘the Divided Line’ (509d-511e) is that we have different levels of knowledge on two planes. Perhaps I do not depart much from Plato’s view if I put it this way: on the plane of the phenomenal world, we can have images or illusions on the lower level, and we can have perceptions and opinions or beliefs on the higher level. On the intelligible plane, employing forms, we can have systematic ‘knowledge’ of perceptible things on the lower level (which Plato still ranges with opinion), and we can have a purer form of knowledge concerned with first principles on the higher level— what the *Phaedo* speaks of as the soul reasoning by itself, in itself. Plato uses for these levels, from the lowest to the highest, the terms

*eikasia*      concerned with images

*pistis*      concerned with actual things, living and non-living

*dianoia*      concerned with the concepts of things

*nous, noêsis*      concerned with pure ideas and principles.

Translators are not agreed on what English word to use for each of these terms, nor is Plato himself always consistent in his use of these and other related terms. What is important to note is that the various levels of ‘knowledge’ correspond to and deal with various levels of being or ‘reality (in the common usage of the term)’. Thus it is only in the highest reaches of intelligence, when the mind works solely with pure ideas, that it converses with reality in a genuine sense.

There are thus two main types or levels of knowledge. (1) Knowledge based on the bodily senses is knowledge about becoming, *peri genesin*, it produces *doxa* and can never rise above *doxa*. (2) Knowledge through pure reason is knowledge about true being or reality, *peri ousian* (*Republic*, 534a). Corresponding to the four levels represented by the four sections of the Divided Line there are four states in the mind (*psuchê*): Intelligence (*noêsis*, *phronêsis*) at the highest level, thought



(*dianoia*) at the second, belief (*pistis*) at the third, and at the lowest illusion (*eikasia*) (*Republic*, 511d-e).

(1) While the objective sciences may be (i) empirically descriptive and inductive, based mainly on observation, experiment, statistics, and the like, or (ii) theoretically deductive, proceeding from assumptions and definitions, (2) philosophy can employ analogy and deduction marginally, but in its highest reaches, as dialectic, it can only be creative or, to use the term I used elsewhere, oracular. Plato did not care much for (1, i), which can produce nothing but *doxa*. The fact that this is the major part of what we now commonly mean by science, and that this is what has given us what power we have over nature and is, together with (1, ii), the foundation of our technological achievements, makes it difficult for us to grasp the fundamental Socratic-Platonic insight, that all such knowledge, for all its practical—perhaps vital—utility, does not give understanding. That the natural sciences must be relegated to the region of opinion, *doxa*, is clearly implied in Socrates' renouncement of physical investigation, as he explained in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo* (95-102).

The Allegory of the Cave merely illustrates what has gone before. Plato aptly puts it after the theoretical exposition to reinforce and fix the salient points of the preceding discussion. Because it is an allegory it is open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

Plato was under no obligation to dovetail the detailed images and divisions of the Sun simile, the Divided Line illustration, and the Cave allegory into each other. All three are truthful figurative representations of one basic conception. If our aim is to share the insight behind the representations we will have no difficulty. Only when we think that each expresses a fixed dogma do we find scope for playing the erudite game of discovering inconsistencies and contradictions.

In the sphere of knowledge, the Form of the Good is last to behold and the hardest, but when seen reason shows that it is the

source (*aitia*) of all that is right and beautiful, engendering in the visible sphere light and the lord of light, and in the intelligible sphere it, itself being lord, gives reality and intelligence, *alêtheian kai noun paraschomenê*, (517b-c). Here the merging of the epistemological and the metaphysical is complete. The Form of the Good is the first principle of intelligibility and it is the perfection of being and we see that no being can be intelligible except as emanating from that source.

Again, the power of learning and the faculty of understanding all things is inherent in the mind, *psuchê*, and as if the eye were unable to see unless we turned the whole body towards the thing to be seen, we find that it is by directing the whole of the soul away from the sphere of becoming and towards true being, that we may behold the Good (518c-d). True knowledge is the journeying of the whole soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of reality and perfect being, which is the Good. And we must remember that in so doing we should not direct the soul to anything extraneous but to its own reality. The heavenly abode of the forms in the *Phaedrus* is poetry and mystic symbolism. The poetry and the symbolism are needed to represent the spiritual plane of being in which alone human beings attain the highest perfection accessible to them. In that highest perfection reality, intelligence, and goodness are one and the same.

Education then is the art of directing the soul, not implanting into it light and sight from outside, but knowing that the light is in it, it has only to be pointed in the right direction (518d). And just as that knowledge is not to be injected from outside into the mind but is to be found in the mind itself, so the reality we seek is nothing foreign to us but is the reality of the fount and spring of the intelligible realm, the principle of intelligence itself. And true education is that turning of the whole soul (mind) towards true being. Socrates had always taught that to know the good is to be good. For Socrates that remained an ethical principle. Now Plato teaches that to know the good is to be one with the good. The ethical principle is translated into a metaphysical principle.

## VIII

Next Plato sketches the program of education which seeks to turn the whole soul towards true being, the form of the Good. The guiding principle of the whole of Plato's program of education is that learning is to be sought in and directed to that which always is, *aei ontos*, not that which becomes and perishes (527b). I reiterate, that is not to deny the utility of empirical knowledge; it only means that that is not where to seek understanding. Our objectively oriented modern minds have in fact completely lost the notion of understanding by equating the word with 'knowing.'

After outlining his program of studies, going through arithmetic, geometry, plane and solid, astronomy and harmonics, Plato tells us that all of that was merely the prelude to the chief study; for those who have mastered these studies are not yet dialecticians (531d). Those we may say are our professionals and specialized scientists, together with our media gurus and our politicians. What torrents of nonsense they let loose on us when they think they can pronounce on ultimate questions and questions of principle!

If they are not able to give and receive reason (*dounai te kai apodexasthai logon*) they will not know anything of what we say they ought to know (531e). To 'give and to receive reason,' that is dialectic: but these words which look deceptively simple are an ocean of unsounded depth and call for our closest attention.

When by dialectic, apart from all that is perceptible, through pure reason, we seek reality (*ho estin*) and persist till we grasp the Good, it is then that we attain the goal of intelligence (532a-b). Through this mystic haze, don't we discern the very features of the old Socratic *aporia* and philosophic ignorance, when the search for the good led to knowledge, and the search for knowledge led to the good, and the good and the knowledge turned out to be none other than our ceaseless quest for that one thing that was goodness and knowledge at once and that we find

nowhere but in that restless intelligence which ever seeks that elusive reality?

The idea of the Good in us is the highest conception of Reality we have, and if only perfect being is intelligible—how could the imperfect sustain itself, let alone bring itself or bring anything into being?—then we feel we cannot but conceive of ultimate Reality as being such as is our idea of the Good. We feel that only in the light of the principle that Reality must ultimately be intelligent and good, can the being of the world and our own being be intelligible. In Kantian terms, the only *noumenon* we know is our free will, our creative intelligence; of the world at large all our knowledge is a maze of antinomies; as to ultimate Reality, the only way we can conceive of it intelligibly is to conceive of it in the likeness of our own reality. Kant is untrue to his own transcendental system when he gives the vision inspired by Practical Reason objectivity. We do not know the All; we only have a vision of the All that lends meaning and worth to our life. That is the Form of the Good that we cannot know but can only yearn for, and in the yearning find reality and we ourselves attain reality.

Earlier when Socrates was asked to say what he thought the Form of the Good was, he took refuge in simile. Now Glaucon asks for an account of the nature of dialectic, its various modes, and its methods (532d-e), and Socrates tells him that he (Glaucon) would not be able to follow, because what Socrates had to offer was not an image (*eikona*) but the very reality (*auto to alêthes*), anyhow as it appears to him (*ho ge dê moi phainetai*), and yet he would not affirm whether it is such or not (*ei d' ontôs ê mê, ouket' axion touto diischurizesthai*) (533a). Is this wavering or hedging or blatant inconsistency? It may be partly this and partly that, but it is also something beyond and above all that. Socrates will not affirm whether it is such or not, but he will affirm that there is something to behold (*all' hoti men dê toiouton ti idein, ischuristeon*) (533a). In the highest reaches of intelligence, reality cannot be constrained into a determinate formulation, but it can receive truthful expression in metaphor,

symbol and myth. We will return to this further on as it is of the utmost importance.

We have various grades of knowledge (let us give ourselves some rein with terminology here). We have empirical knowledge, wholly concerned with perceptible things. And we have theoretical knowledge—mathematics and the sciences—which yet falls below the level of dialectic because it does not question its basic concepts and assumptions; does not transcend its first principles: it can and must from time to time criticize its ground-principles, but then it replaces those by others which—by the very nature of objective science—must be assumed without question (*mê dunamenai logon didonai autôn*) (533b-c). Then we have dialectic—the method of philosophy—which alone proceeds by destroying its ground assumptions (*tas hupotheseis anairousa*) to reach a first, secure principle (*ep' autên tēn archēn hina bebaiôsētai*) (533c-d). But can we ever claim to be in possession of such a principle? Does Plato give us such a principle in any articulate, definitive formulation? Has any philosopher ever produced such a formulation that was not immediately turned into shreds by other philosophers? I think that in that statement about reaching a first secure principle Plato was indulging one of his careless moods when he permitted himself to be inconsistent.

To give a rational account of one's statements is never fully accomplished until the grounds of the statements are demolished. Philosophy is thus a rhythmical process of mythologizing and critical demolition of the myths – that is the diastole and systole of the living mind; if we stop at the diastole we have theory fossilized into superstition; if we stop at the systole, we have a lifeless state of existence, vacant of all meaning and all value. A truly human life demands that we philosophize, and to philosophize is constantly to build up myths and constantly to demolish our myths.

When the philosopher attains to the vision of Reality, which the *Republic*, equally with the *Symposium*, describes as an ineffable vision, she or he can only express the reality she or he beholds in metaphor and myth. The metaphors and myths are

valuable in that they give expression to the perfection of Reality. But they remain metaphors and myths. The philosopher, like the poet, acknowledges that her or his myths are myths. No determinate formulation is definitive: no articulate 'truth' is too holy to be shattered and brought to dust. That is the lesson of the *Parmenides* that students of philosophy have failed to grasp. The value of philosophy resides in giving scope to the life of active, creative intelligence. The basic concepts of science are harmless when regarded as working fictions, as Newton plainly acknowledged that the notion of gravity was a working tool the essence of which remained a mystery to him. Regrettably, scientists commonly think of their working tools as ultimate truths, as hard facts, forgetting that a fact is only a fact for a mind; in nature there are no facts but dumb phenomena that only acquire meaning, as Kant said, through concepts provided by the mind.

Throughout the dialogues Plato uses the term 'dialectic' in various senses. What concerns us at this point is its usage in this part of the *Republic*, and this has been another subject of endless dispute among scholars. The reason is that it was not Plato's intention to say anything specific about dialectic, nor could he had he wanted to, since for Plato dialectic, in this context, is simply the highest reach of philosophical thinking: to define that is to define philosophy, and that is just what Plato had been doing or trying to do in this central part of the *Republic*, and indeed in the dialogues as a whole. We can with justice say that Plato's dialectic is one with Spinoza's understanding *sub specie aeternitatis*: if we ask for a definition of this, we can find none other than Spinoza's *Ethics* in its entirety.

## IX

Now we can see the *Theaetetus* in true perspective within Plato's total view of philosophy, knowledge, and reality. As I have used Chapter Six of *Plato: An Interpretation* as the basis for the preceding pages dealing with the central part of the *Republic*. I will use parts of Chapter Nine, "Theory of Knowledge," with omissions and additions, as the basis for the following section dealing with the *Theaetetus*.

When, for the first time in the dialogues, the question 'What is knowledge?' is posed in the *Theaetetus*, the examination does not proceed in Socrates' usual elenctic manner. The knowledge we find ourselves concerned with there is neither the knowledge that is one with virtue of the early dialogues nor the knowledge of the *Republic* that is of the essence of Reality, but the more homely variety that all of us, from the most ignorant to the most learned, cannot do without in our humdrum daily lives.

As Cornford says in the Introduction to *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (1935), "The *Theaetetus* will formulate and examine the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out of account the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience" (p.7). In the *Parmenides* this is affirmed in the clearest terms by 'Parmenides' at the close of the first part of the dialogue. This is also what we can learn from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The 'knowledge' that sensible experience yields hovers in the Divided Line between the higher level of the lower plane and the lower level of the higher plane, but cannot rise above that.

After some preliminaries, Socrates leads to the question, What is knowledge? and, as in the early dialogues, we have a very broad conception of knowledge. Geometry and astronomy, the doctor's skill, the craftsman's know-how, all of these are instances of *sophia*, and *sophia* is the same as *epistêmê*. So what is this knowledge?

At 151d-e the boy Theaetetus advances the first serious answer to the question: “It seems to me that he who knows senses (perceives, *aisthanesthai*) that which he knows, and as far as it appears to me now, knowledge is nothing other than sensation (perception, *aisthêsis*).” Socrates is quick to identify this position with Protagoras’s doctrine that man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not (152a). A little further on he connects it also with the Heraclitian doctrine of flux. (This, it seems, Plato does, because he intends to work the doctrine of flux into the theory of perception which he is about to introduce.)

Perception—both as experience and as content of experience—is a product. No event in the phenomenal world is simple. All sensation is the outcome of a conjunction of factors: the factors may belong partly to the percipient individual and partly to the ambient world, or they may pertain to the body of the percipient. In the product—the perception, which is one whole—we can distinguish a subjective dimension and an objective dimension. We may monitor the subjective dimension in various ways, determining the conditions under which a specific sensation is produced, but the subjective aspect can neither be reduced to those conditions, nor can it be objectified in any way.

“What you call white color is not itself something outside your eyes nor in your eyes, nor must you assign it any place of its own” (153d-e). Only the whole is real. Color is not in the flower, nor in your eye, nor in your brain. Color is an aspect of the whole, and the only thing that embraces that whole is your mind. But ‘mind’ here is unsatisfactory and misleading; the Greek *psuchê* is a better term, but we should take it to mean the total person, the living personality.

At 154b-155d Socrates raises some problems we encounter when we consider—on the Protagorean assumption—sizes and numbers in relation to one another. Cornford says of these ‘puzzles’ that their “relevance to their context is by no means obvious. Nor is it easy to understand why anyone should be perplexed by them” (p.41). Quite on the contrary, I find in this



passage significant support for the principle that nothing particular or actual *is* in and by itself. Anything is what it is in a context, a situation taken for the purpose in hand as a whole; and as the context, like all things actual, is constantly changing, so the particular thing housed in that context is always becoming what it was not. When Socrates then says, “Do you now understand why these things are so, according to what we say Protagoras meant?” he means that things must be so as long as we take appearance as our object of knowledge.

In the theory of sense-perception presented in 155d-157c we should, I think, distinguish two elements: (1) the philosophical element affirming the fluidity and inseparability of all things actual; (2) a physical-physiological element, which is a scientific hypothesis (not in the Platonic sense of the word, but in the modern sense). The first element offers a genuine and valuable philosophical insight. The second is for historians of science to comment on.

At 157d Socrates asks Theaetetus whether he is satisfied with the view that nothing is, but only becomes, good or beautiful or any of the other qualities they had been speaking of. This clearly indicates that the foregoing discussion was confined to perception of particular things within the sphere of becoming. Thus proscribed the account may be accepted as satisfactory; but as the sequel will show, such perception does not yield genuine knowledge. The process by which a thing becomes this or that describes but does not explain how the thing has this or that character. The reductionist description does not make the thing intelligible.

In a most important passage, 184b-185e, Plato argues for the mental origin of the ideas of existence, sameness, unity and the like. These ideas are not to be found in the objective sphere. Firstly, even in the case of simple perception, as seeing a colour or hearing a sound, it is not the eye that sees or the ear that hears, but the mind or soul (*eite psuchên eite hoti dei kalein*, 184d) sees through the eye and hears through the ear. Still more, in the case of thoughts that apply to the objects of different senses, there is

no special organ through which these are perceived, but the mind itself by itself considers these, (*autê di' hautês hê psuchê ta koina moi phainetai peri pantôn episkopein*, 185d-e). The argument does not prove anything. Like all of Plato's arguments for the forms elsewhere in the dialogues it simply elucidates the conception of the intelligible as distinct from the given content of experience. Aristotle should have seen from this the error of his theory of abstraction: we do not see an instance of sameness then another and another before we form the universal 'sameness'; to see one instance of sameness we have to have already the concept of 'the same.'

In the following passage (186a-e) the idea is unfolded further. The mind has cognizance of the sensible through the organs of the body. Even simple perception involves a conceptual element. Bare sensation is possible to all animals. But it only becomes perception when it is clothed in a judgment: here is something green; this is hot. In the judgment the given element has no being or truth in itself; these are supplied by the mind: *ousia* and *alêtheia*, as we know from the *Republic*, are inseparable and pertain only to the intelligible.

Knowledge is not to be sought in what the senses deliver to us but in what the mind brings forth from its own treasure-house, it is not to be found in the given content of experience, but in the patterns into which the mind articulates the contents of experience. This is true of all levels of 'knowledge,' from perception (in so far as it goes beyond the passive reception of impressions), through belief and reasoned knowledge, to the understanding of ideals.

## X

Having come to the conclusion that perception cannot be identified with knowledge (186e), the *Theaetetus* turns to the examination of judgment and the claim of judgment to be knowledge. Yet not all judgment; for there is such a thing as false judgment (187a-b); or is there not? Earlier at 167a-b, Socrates, speaking for Protagoras has said that no one can judge falsely, “for it is not possible to think what is not or to think other than what one experiences, and that is always true.”

Perception is infallible. What appears to be in some way is. Opinion is fallible, because what appears true makes a claim that stretches to actualities that are independent of the cognizant agent. Both perception and opinion relate to the phenomenal sphere. In the sphere of pure ideas, what appears true is a meaningful view, possessed of a degree of reality. Just as taste cannot be dubbed right or wrong but may be characterized as wholesome or unwholesome, so a philosophical view cannot be judged true or false, but can be regarded as giving expression to a fuller or more constricted reality.

How can we distinguish between a false statement and a true one, a false belief and a true belief? Subjectively, there is no mark of truth or falsity. Subjectively, we can only speak of a more coherent and more comprehensive view and of one that is less so. So, in the realm of pure thought, we can only have a better and more satisfactory view or one that is inferior and less satisfactory. If we are in fact duped by Descartes’ wicked demon, we cannot say to him, “We are wise to your trick,” unless, to have his final laugh, he decides to let us know what fools we have been. But even then we can decide to be the ones that laugh last, and say to him, “We have truly lived every moment of that illusion.” But when we are concerned with the objective world we can, practically, have criteria and methods of verification. But these are not absolute. They are arbitrary, conventional, pragmatic, good in certain contexts and for certain times.

What Plato terms *allodoxia*—when one mistakes in his mind one thing that is, for another thing that is (189b-c)—is a psychological phenomenon. But when Theaetetus speaks of thinking ‘ugly’ in place of ‘beautiful’ he is pointing to something on a different level. Here we have a system of beliefs that can be dubbed false only in a moral sense, but not logically.

At the level of thinking as discourse carried by the mind within itself, where the mind makes use of its store of ideas to create new formations (189e-190a), we can speak of error when the formation produced does not agree with a more favoured formation. The one formation by itself cannot be false. The idea of a centaur is not wrong; it is meaningful and valid in the world of fable, but when a boy sets out to find a centaur in the woods, we tell him, That is a different world.

When I see someone approaching and mistake him for Socrates (191b), does that involve a false judgment? The experience can be regarded as an expectation that fails to be fulfilled. Even if, on seeing the approaching form, I say to myself, “I will presently see Socrates,” then (1) if that is taken in the sense of, “I believe I will presently see Socrates,” the statement is truthful; it can be disappointed, but cannot be falsified; but (2) if taken as a prediction then, as an imaginative possibility, it is neither true nor false in itself but only turns out true or false when the fact materializes. (Cp. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, ch.9, 18a-b, and see my *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, 2998, Bk.II. ch.3 sect.13.)

I would say that we never make mistakes among our thoughts themselves. Descartes was right; when we operate with clear and distinct ideas we do not err. All error in the realm of ideas is an imperfection remediable by making our ideas more clear and distinct.

No one will think that 11 is 12, but one may take 11 objects to be 12 or think that 5 objects and 7 objects make 11 objects, and these are the cases where verification is applicable and where consequently we can speak of truth and falsity.

When we came to examine judgment as knowledge we turned our attention first to false judgment. But the argument shows that we were wrong to seek an understanding of false judgment first, for that is impossible before knowing what knowledge is (200c-d).

Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is (true) belief supported by a *logos* (206c). That is what Plato had been saying in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*. What is that *logos*? What is the *logos* that gives understanding? In *Charmides*, Critias, concluding his speech at 164c-165b, says, *nun d' ethelô toutou soi didonai logon*. This may be the first occurrence of *didonai logon* in the dialogues, and it is clear it has no special technical connotation here. It is part of the common speech of the Hellenes and I think it possibly retains this general, non-technical sense throughout the dialogues, even in the *Republic* and in the later critical dialogues. It simply means to clarify one's view and justify it as reasonable. I do not think that there is anything in the dialogues to indicate that *didonai logon* meant for Plato any specific method or procedure.

In the *Republic* the *logos* that is necessary for true knowledge can possibly be equated with the whole process of dialectic. But still, what we are to understand by that *logos* is not explicitly stated. It may be that Plato, in *Theaetetus* 201c ff., was trying to examine that principle more closely. Does Plato here or anywhere else give a definite answer to the question? I don't think so: I think the *Republic* remains the most complete expression of Platonism and in the *Republic* dialectic is simply reasoning, *phronêsis*, the free exercise of *nous*.

So, in the end, true 'judgment' accompanied by *logos* does not yield proof or demonstration, but thought that is consistent and coherent. Philosophical 'truth' is more of an aesthetic value: a philosophical viewpoint is good not when it is definitively demonstrable, not when it is irrefutable, but when it is aesthetically satisfactory.

## XI

So what is the upshot of the *Theaetetus*? We might say that when Plato, late in his career, at last poses the direct question: What is knowledge? he ends where the early ‘definition’ dialogues ended: Any attempt to understand knowledge in terms of anything other than knowledge leads nowhere; the only possible answer is: Knowledge is knowledge: to know is for intelligence to behold the self-evidence of the form or of a configuration of forms constituting a coherent whole, which is nothing but a modulation of the reality of that very intelligence. Knowledge is the radiance of creative intelligence: knowledge is intelligence shining in its own evidence. Like all that is real, knowledge is ultimately a mystery that is not explicable in terms of, or reducible to, anything extraneous to its own self-evident reality. (It is obvious that in speaking of ‘knowledge’ here I follow Plato’s loose use of *episteme*.)

The *Theaetetus* is an explanation and extended vindication of the Platonic distinction between *epistêmê* and *doxa*. The whole sphere of empirical experience is subject to Heraclitian flux and Protagorean relativism. If that were all, there would be no knowledge. To see in the *Theaetetus* a revision of Plato’s position in the *Republic* would be completely to fail to understand Plato. In the Platonic corpus, the *Theaetetus* is an appendix to the *Republic*.

For Socrates there was knowledge on the one hand and ignorance on the other hand. That was all he needed for pursuing his mission: to make people acknowledge their ignorance and seek understanding. Plato found that the shadowy region between knowledge and ignorance is not only important for the practical business of living, but actually claims much of the attention of seekers after knowledge who are likely to be content with it, believing they have reached their goal. This is so much the case with us today, with our empiricism and scientism and the reduction of philosophy to so many ‘scientific’ disciplines. In the *Theaetetus* as much as in the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave, Plato meant to show the error of this view.

It is ridiculous to say that in the *Theaetetus* nothing is said of the “doctrine of incorporeal and intelligible forms” (Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, p.247) just because the specific vocabulary of the *Phaedo* is not employed, when we have the affirmation of the reality and of the vital importance of the intelligible order in the plainest language. When a creative writer, who never tires of cautioning us against the deceptiveness of fixed formulations, comes after the lapse of many years to give fresh expression to his position and outlook on fundamental questions, it would be against the nature of things to expect him to use the exact verbal formulations he had used before. The identity of the concepts underneath the words can only be missed by an intellect befuddled by erroneous preconceptions.

When we are told in the *Sophist* that discourse is the weaving together of forms (*tên allêlôn tôn eidôn sumplokên ho logos gegonen hêmin*, 259e), Plato is not merely offering an apt metaphor, but is giving us a true image of the nature of philosophical thinking. Philosophizing is the formation of an integral landscape by interconnecting ideas.

G. C. Field writes, “The ultimate object of all the activities of the Academy was, at any rate for Plato, to arrive at final philosophical truth” (*Plato and his Contemporaries*, 1930, 1948, p.27). I feel that Plato would strongly object to this formulation, for ‘final philosophical truth’ is not only beyond human beings, but beyond all determinate thought, human or divine. I think that Plato would have preferred to say that the object of the activities at the Academy was to achieve a philosophical temper and frame of mind, for the vision gained at the summit of the philosophical ascent (as described in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, and again in Epistle VII) is not an intellectual grasping of a truth but the experiencing of a perfection – a perfection that is to be a standard and criterion for our thought henceforward, not a truth that can be formulated or communicated in definitive form.

That understanding which comes from inside us, and only from inside us, cannot be contained in any fixed formulation, and because it cannot be confined in a determinate formulation, any

such formulation is necessarily mythical and can be demolished and must be demolished if it is not to turn into a superstition enslaving the mind instead of giving it access to Reality. That, in my view is the gist of Plato's metaphysical epistemology, and that is a lesson we still stand very much in need of grasping. All great philosophers give us views of reality, dream-visions, all valuable, but none that can stand as true. And I maintain that this does not lead to nihilistic relativism because we have the secure ground we need in the integrity of intelligence, which gives us meaningful conceptions of rationality and of absolute values.

All philosophy that presumes to arrive at and to give expression to definitive truth produces a false conceit of wisdom that has to be removed by true dialectical philosophy. The most valuable permanent task of philosophy is to demolish, primarily, not error, but truth that gives itself the air of being absolute. The other function of philosophy is to create a vision that must in its turn submit itself to demolition. The only thing that lasts is the creative activity of intelligence.

## XII

I cannot close this essay without reverting to the question where to find reality. Plato is not blind to the fact that we are surrounded by solid objects and faced with forces that press on us and push us this way and that way. Of all those objects and forces we only know the exterior, and that exterior is changeable and constantly fleeting. That is true of our own body; in itself it is inconstant, corruptible, always vanishing. In the things of the world, including our body, seen from the outside, there is no reality. The reality must be within, the power that causes the movement. But people seem to be so constituted that some of them only attend to the outside and think that what they see and touch is all there is, while others are attentive to what is within where they find what is real. Plato in a fine passage in the *Sophist* represents this as the Battle of Gods and Giants. I quote thus



below in Cornford's translation. The speakers are the Eleatic Stranger and the lad Theaetetus:

“STR. What we shall see is something like a Battle of Gods and Giants going on between them over their quarrel about reality.

“THEAET. How so?

“STR. One party is trying to drag everything down to earth out of heaven and the unseen, literally grasping rocks and trees in their hands; for they lay hold upon every stock and stone and strenuously affirm that real existence belongs only to that which can be handled and offers resistance to the touch. They define reality as the same thing as body, and as soon as one of the opposite party asserts that anything without a body is real, they are utterly contemptuous and will not listen to another word.

“THEAET. The people you describe are certainly a formidable crew. I have met quite a number of them before now.

“STR. Yes, and accordingly their adversaries are very wary in defending their position somewhere in the heights of the unseen, maintaining with all their force that true reality consists in intelligible and bodiless Forms. In the clash of argument they shatter and pulverise the bodies which their opponents wield, and what those others allege to be true reality they call, not real being, but a sort of moving process of becoming. On this issue an interminable battle is always going on between the two camps” (*Sophist*, 246a-c, tr. F. M. Cornford.)

The battle is still raging. It is basically a clash of loyalties. The two contesting armies have sworn allegiance to two different worlds. In this essay and other writings of mine I am not trying to make the ‘Giants’ change their mind but only to make them see that their own minds are more worthy of being called ‘real’ than all the hard objects they deal with in their empirical investigations.

Cairo, May 1, 2014



# WHITEHEAD'S REAL WORLD

## Prefatory note:

I began this paper as an essay on Whitehead's philosophy, but I found that I was interspersing much, maybe too much, of my own thought. I do not apologize for that. From my first book onwards I have always stated that in writing about any philosopher I do not intend or pretend to expound that philosopher's thought, but to philosophize in conversing with the particular philosopher. Whitehead's philosophy is there in his beautifully exhilarating and inspiring books. What follows is an interchange of thought with Whitehead. The reader may find the essay harshly critical; the reason is that its central theme, Whitehead's conception of what is real, is just where my philosophy is most opposed to his. This in no way contradicts my finding Whitehead the most original, most profound, most inspiring, and most wrongfully neglected of twentieth century philosophers,

[Page numbers for works of Whitehead cited below refer to the following editions: *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, seventh impression, 1970; *Science and the Modern World*, Pelican, 1938; *Religion in the Making*, Fordham University Press, New York, Third Printing 2001; *Process and Reality*, corrected edition edited by David Ray

Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, The Free Press, New York, 1978, Paperback Edition 1985; *Adventures of Ideas*, Pelican 1942; *Modes of Thought*, The Free Press, New York, Paperback Edition 1968; *Essays in Science and Philosophy*, Rider and Company, London, 1948.]

## OVERVIEW

“**C**anst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7). Neither can a philosopher by searching arrive at what she or he seeks. No philosopher has ever reached his system by searching. An original philosopher conceives and gives birth to her or his baby philosophy miraculously out of their inner being early in their life and then work out the reasonings and the arguments, even when things do not seemingly take that exact course. Whitehead apparently meandered over wide and widely distanced regions long before he began expounding his philosophy in his mature philosophical works, but I suppose that the philosophy of process and of organism was early there, fostered by the pious upbringing of his boyhood and nourished by the poetry of the Romantics that I have no doubt he loved in that tender age. With Wordsworth and Shelley he saw the world as a throbbing, living Being. He could not but hate it when the Mathematics he was enamored with and the Physics that enchanted him pictured the world as a set of lifeless abstractions. His serious philosophical works had to begin with *Science and the Modern World* that disclosed the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. He had to show that mathematics and science, for all their brilliance, all their charm and beauty, all their service to civilization, were superficial, simplistic, and basically flawed. Hence the doctrine of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness was the foundation-stone of Whitehead’s ‘speculative philosophy.’ Even before he began working on the philosophical works in his late period, we can clearly detect in the early mathematical and scientific writings the fundamental

notions of the unity of nature, the inter-relatedness of all things, and the seminal ideas of the ‘event’ and of ‘duration.’

Apart from the founders of religions, such as Zarathustra and the Buddha, and great mystics, such as Giordano Bruno, and next to Socrates and Spinoza, I think it is in Whitehead that we find a philosopher whose life and thought formed an integral whole.

Alfred North Whitehead was born on February 15, 1861. “The family, grandfather, father, uncles, brothers, engaged in activities concerned with education, religion and Local Administration.” His grandfather Thomas Whitehead, “at the age of twenty-one, became head of a private school” to which his father, Alfred Whitehead, “succeeded at the correspondingly early age of twenty-five, in the year 1852.” Alfred Whitehead was ordained as a clergyman of the Anglican Church about 1860 and was appointed Vicar of St. Peters Parish in 1866 or 1867. (“Autobiographical Notes” in *Essays in Science and Philosophy*, published posthumously in 1948, p.7.)

In December 1890 he married Evelyn Willoughby Wade. It was a happy marriage, a very happy marriage. He says, “The effect of my wife upon my outlook on the world has been so fundamental that it must be mentioned as an essential factor in my philosophic output. ... Her vivid life has taught me that beauty, moral and aesthetic, is the aim of existence; and that kindness, and love, and artistic satisfaction are among its modes of attainment.” They had three children, born between 1891 and 1898. “They all served in the First World War: our eldest son throughout its whole extent, in France, in East Africa, and in England; our daughter in the Foreign Office in England and Paris; our youngest boy served in the Air Force: his plane was shot down in France with fatal results, in March, 1918” (p.11).

Whitehead began as a mathematician. He studied mathematics and taught mathematics. His first published book was *A Treatise on Universal Algebra* (1898). He intended to continue that work in a second volume and only gave that up when he engaged with Bertrand Russell on their collaborative

masterpiece, *Principia Mathematica*, 1910-13. He then published the short *Introduction to Mathematics*, 1911. The world of mathematics is a world of abstractions, elegant, beautiful, intriguing; and though those abstractions may have a life of their own, they are cut off from the full-blooded vibrant life of common humanity. In *Modes of Thought* (p.93) Whitehead says: “The discovery of mathematics, like all discoveries, both advanced human understanding, and also produced novel modes of error. Its error was the introduction of the doctrine of form, devoid of life and motion.” Russell could live in two parallel worlds, intellectually in the world of mathematics and of his kind of bloodless analytic philosophy and practically in the tumultuous world of the political and social problems that plague suffering humanity. For Russell those two worlds could remain separate with the separateness of Euclidean parallel lines. But not so for Whitehead. Whitehead, it seems, felt the need to engage intellectually in the actual concrete world we live our daily life in. He turned to physics, then to biology. Those sciences too deal with merely theoretical representations of the living world. It was Whitehead’s interest in education—an interest inherited from his father and grandfather—that opened up the secret of living reality to him. In *The Aims of Education* he put his hand on the heart-throb of the actual world and in *Religion in the Making* he entered into the very soul of living reality.

Although *The Aims of Education* was first published as a book in 1929, the title essay was delivered in 1916 as Whitehead’s Presidential address to the Mathematical Association of England. It provides the best point of entrance into the thought of Whitehead: it reveals his basic concerns and adumbrates many of the notions and principles that were developed in his later philosophical works.

When I started working on this essay it struck me as odd that I had not included *The Aims of Education* in my re-reading of Whitehead’s philosophical works while preparing my latest book, *Quest of Reality* (2013). *The Aims of Education* is clearly the work of a gifted teacher who taught with love, rich in insight and full of practical wisdom, but what impressed me most when I first

read it sixty years ago, as I clearly recall, was the emphasis Whitehead lays on the notion of rhythm. Perhaps it was thanks to his involvement in education that Whitehead saw there was rhythm in all life and was convinced that Nature, the World, is a single living organism, is indeed the cosmic animal of Plato's *Timaeus*.

In the opening sentence of *The Aims of Education* we have the word 'activity': "Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling." Culture is not knowledge, however vast, comprehensive, advanced and sophisticated. It is activity of thought. Activity is the mark of life. Later on, in *Science and the Modern World* and later works, we see that all that the natural sciences give us are abstractions, symbols, fictions, and when we probe beneath or beyond the abstractions we find not a thing—not a fixed, abiding thing—but activity; and not an active thing, but sheer activity. Perhaps Whitehead does not bring that out as starkly as I do, but I find it implicit in all of Whitehead's metaphysical thought, and towards the end of this essay I show, as I have already done in *Quest of Reality*, where I think Whitehead erred by stopping short.

In Chapter II Whitehead asserts that life is essentially periodic and speaks of the rhythmic character of growth. He delineates the educational process—which should be a process of intellectual progress—as consisting of cyclic processes and distinguishes in each cycle three stages which, for the purpose in hand, he terms "the stage of romance, the stage of precision, and the stage of generalisation." In the closing paragraph of the chapter he admonishes us "not to exaggerate into sharpness the distinction between the three stages of a cycle." We are reminded that all three stages, "romance, precision, generalisation are all present throughout." Thus also in the closing paragraph of Chapter I Whitehead equates the reverence inculcated by religious education with the perception "that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity." This clearly adumbrates the philosophy of organism that was to come into full flower in Whitehead's metaphysical works. The 'parts'

of an organism may be distinguishable but are never separable. When the members of an organic whole are taken apart they are no longer what they were in the organic whole. Do we find here the answer to those critics who charge Whitehead, or any profound metaphysician, with being obscure and unintelligible? Descartes's "clear and distinct ideas" are not for the metaphysician, any more than they are for the poet, for they are out of character with living reality. The obscurity and imprecision of metaphysical notions are necessary for insight into unfathomable and ineffable reality and the revelation of an original vision demands an original language. That is why minds nurtured in the empirical-analytical tradition find it difficult to be open to metaphysical thinking.

The notion of duration which is a fundamental element in Whitehead's final metaphysical vision is clearly indicated in "The Anatomy of Some Scientific Ideas": "If it be admitted ... that we live in durations and not in instants, namely that the present occupies a stretch of time, the distinction between memory and immediate presentation cannot be quite fundamental; for always we have with us the fading present as it becomes the immediate past" (pp.189-90).

Our raw experience, the 'untreated' sensations that are impressed on Locke's *tabula rasa*, are a nebulous bulk. We create fictions to turn that nebulous bulk into distinct things. Our science, from the most primitive to the most highly sophisticated, refines and develops those fictions, but they remain fictions. Whitehead, continuing the work of Plato, tries to shake us out of our indolent acquiescence in that fictional world and make us wake up to an awareness of what is real. Bergson also worked in that direction. But that was asking too much of most of our erudite philosophers and scientists. They found Whitehead obscure or even unintelligible. They preferred to neglect him and go on living in their neat, clear, functional world of well-tried fictions.

The metaphysical stage of Whitehead's work began when, in 1924, at the ripe age of sixty-three, he was invited to become



professor of philosophy at Harvard. In the course of 13 years, from 1925 to 1938, he published the half-dozen original works expounding his philosophy of organism.

## SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD

I think I said somewhere in *Quest of Reality* that Whitehead's philosophy developed slowly, but it seems that by the time he came to give the lectures that constitute the main body of *Science and the Modern World* he had completely formulated the outline and the basics of his philosophy of organism and process, or it may be that it was in the course of preparing those lectures that he worked out his metaphysical philosophy. After all, there was only the relatively short period of 22 years between those Lowell Lectures and the time when the great man passed away. Of course, as I suggested above, his fundamental outlook must have been formed early in youth and a number of the basic concepts of his mature philosophy can be found clearly defined in the works antedating his metaphysical period.

Whitehead introduces his pivotal notion of organism in the context of a discussion of quantum theory. I do not know how the quantum theory in the second decade of the twenty-first century stands to what it was in the third decade of the twentieth century, but that is nothing to us here as I am not writing about physics but about how Whitehead presented his notion of organism. The quantum theory ascribed to electrons a discontinuous existence in space. This suggests that "we have to revise all our notions of the ultimate character of material existence." Further on Whitehead writes: "A steadily sounding note is explained as the outcome of vibrations in the air: a steady colour is explained as the outcome of vibrations in ether. If we explain the steady endurance of matter on the same principle, we shall conceive each primordial element as a vibratory ebb and flow of an underlying energy, or activity" (*Science and the Modern World*, Chapter II, p.50). If "the ultimate elements of matter are in their essence vibratory"

then, “apart from being a periodic system, such an element would have no existence. ... The field is now open for the introduction of some new doctrine of organism which may take the place of the materialism with which, since the seventeenth century, science has saddled philosophy” (p.51). We may say that this marks the birth of Whitehead’s formal philosophy of organism. As I said before, his basic outlook, his *Weltanschauung*, must have been formed early under the influence of his Christian upbringing and of the poetry of the Romantics. It seems that it was only later that Whitehead found support for his position in Plato’s view of *dunamis* as the mark of what is real.

Early in *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead introduces the notion of the ‘immediate occasion.’ The immediate occasion as the immediate presentation of our experience is the only thing of which we have immediate and certain cognizance. He also calls it an event to emphasize that it is not a static thing in space but is a thing in process in space-time. And that is what Whitehead calls concrete reality. “We must start with the event as the ultimate unit of natural occurrence” (p.125). The event is what is real (in Whitehead’s sense of the word). And the event is organism in process, not *an* organism in process, but process on the plane of organic integrity. Whitehead introduces the notion ‘prehension’ and works with it for a while but at one point (p.90) says we may abandon it in favour of the term ‘event.’ (In *Process and Reality* Part III is titled “The Theory of Prehensions” but the term mostly used throughout is ‘feeling/s.’) For Whitehead every event is a value in itself. I take this as equivalent to what I think I sometime expressed by saying that every determination is an affirmation.

The central message of *Science and the Modern World* is the disclosure of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. Whitehead first introduces this principle in Chapter III. The Ionian thinkers initiated the philosophical endeavour by posing the question: What is the world made of? Whitehead says that the answer given by the seventeenth century science “was that the world is a succession of instantaneous configurations of matter – or of material” (p.65). This was “the orthodox creed of physical

science. ... It worked. ... But the difficulties of this theory of materialistic mechanism very soon became apparent” (p.66).

“This simple location of instantaneous material configurations is what Bergson has protested against.” After commenting on points of agreement and points of disagreement between his view and Bergson’s, Whitehead continues, “There is an error ... the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete. It is an example of what I will call the ‘Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness’” (p.66). The ‘concrete’ that physicists mistakenly trade for their bloodless abstractions, that we encounter all the time in our living experience, and that is for Whitehead what is real, is found in a spatio-temporal unity that Whitehead terms an ‘event’ or an ‘immediate occasion.’ For “nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process” (p.90). Here we have in embryo the cosmology that Whitehead was to develop in *Process and Reality*. (My disjointed quotations from Whitehead’s text inevitably give a distorted idea of this central principle of his. The reader should refer to Chapter III and at least read pages 65-66 continuously, or better still read from p.65 to the end of the chapter.)

Whitehead quotes a passage from Francis Bacon. In *Quest of Reality* I referred to this passage more than once but I only quoted the first sentence. But the passage is well worth quoting in full. I reproduce it below as given by Whitehead:

“It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception: for when one body is applied to another, there is a kind of election to embrace that which is agreeable, and to exclude or expel that which is ingrate; and whether the body is alterant or altered, evermore a perception precedeth operation; for else all bodies would be alike one to another. And sometimes this perception, in some kind of bodies, is far more subtle than sense; so that sense is but a dull thing in comparison of it: we see a weatherglass will find the least difference of the weather in heat or cold, when we find it not. And this perception is sometimes at a distance, as

well as upon the touch; as when the loadstone draweth iron; or flame naphtha of Babylon, a great distance off. It is therefore a subject of a very noble enquiry, to enquire of the more subtile perceptions; for it is another key to open nature, as well as the sense; and sometimes better. And besides, it is a principal means of natural divination; for that which in these perceptions appeareth early, in the great effects cometh long after.” (Francis Bacon, as quoted by Whitehead on pp.55-6.)

Whitehead comments: “I believe Bacon’s line of thought to have expressed a more fundamental truth than do the materialistic concepts which were then being shaped as adequate for physics. We are now so used to the materialistic way of looking at things ... that it is with some difficulty that we understand the possibility of another mode of approach to the problem of nature” (p.56). Unfortunately, the “materialistic way of looking at things” seems to have now a greater hold on our philosophers than it did in Whitehead’s day.

Prehension is the feeling of an actual occasion for other actual occasions. Whitehead uses the word ‘feeling’ to convey the same idea. That every actual occasion should be open to all actual occasions is only what is to be expected once we conceive the world as an organism. On page 86 Whitehead explains his usage of the term ‘prehension’ thus: “I will use the word ‘prehension’ for *uncognitive apprehension*: by this I mean *apprehension* which may or may not be cognitive.” But on page 90 he says, “Now that we have cleared space and time from the taint of simple location, we may partially abandon the awkward term ‘prehension.’” He now finds the word ‘event’ more appropriate to designate any of those spatio-temporal unities which are the concrete realities. “Accordingly, it may be used instead of the term ‘prehension’ as meaning the thing prehended.” Nevertheless, Whitehead does not abandon the term ‘prehension’; it features prominently in *Process and Reality* and in *Adventures of Ideas*.

According to Whitehead, a thing prehends whatever it acts upon and whatever acts upon it. Newton confessed that how one body acted on another body remained a mystery to him as it necessarily must remain to every scientist who refuses to fool herself or himself into thinking that a detailed account of how a thing comes about explains the thing. The doctrine of prehensions is a philosophical fiction as good as but no better than Thales's affirmation that all things are full of gods. Whitehead with all his profound metaphysical insight remained too much of a mathematician and too much of a scientist to bid farewell to the dream of reaching a 'true' account of the world. Were he only a mathematician or scientist he would have endorsed Newton's confession; were he only a metaphysician he would have said with Plato that he was only giving us a 'likely tale.' It is a pity that the profoundest philosopher of the twentieth century misunderstood both Plato, whom he lauded, and Kant, whom he decried.

Whitehead closes Chapter IV with this sentence: "The concept of the order of nature is bound up with the concept of nature as the locus of organisms in process of development," This sums up Whitehead's cosmology.

The detailed analyses and constructions in pp.126-129 illustrate my view that all metaphysical theorization is imaginative formulation of ideas, giving us intelligible visions, without any right to claim being true representations of objective actuality. When they make such a claim they can readily be contradicted and 'refuted.' This is the source of the endless feuds among philosophers that gave a bad name to philosophy.

By making metaphysics continuous with science Whitehead constricts his metaphysics within the confines of cosmology and in doing this disregards both the vital insight of Socrates into the radical difference between science and philosophy and the, to me, incontrovertible Kantian delimitation of the spheres of empirical investigation and that of pure reason. To me, as to Socrates, Plato, and Kant, there is no 'reality' in phenomenal things. No analysis of sources and types of experience can ever yield "proof

of such a reality and of its nature.” His failure to see this was Whitehead’s gravest fault and it is at this point that I see my philosophy going beyond Whitehead. This is a point I return to more than once in what follows.

Whitehead says, “It seems possible that there may be physical laws expressing the modification of the ultimate basic organisms when they form part of higher organisms with adequate compactness of pattern” ( p.175). I do not feel comfortable with the first phrase which suggests that in nature there are or there may be laws waiting for us to discover them. It is evident that nature does not behave haphazardly; the ways of nature have their reason which we can never know with the immediacy with which we know our own purposive acts. But we create laws which happen to fit the ways of nature—save the appearances as the Greeks said—in certain circumstances and at a certain time or times. We have no right to assume that these laws ever fit to perfection or that they will always fit future happenings. There Hume was right. And what I say agrees with Kant’s view. And that is why the scientists’ implicit faith in absolute determinism is basically flawed. Whitehead believes we can approximate perfect laws. In this he shares the error of Leibniz and of Spinoza. (For a fuller discussion see the section “Whitehead on Determinism and Free Will” below.)

When articulating details of his philosophy of organism Whitehead gives us metaphysical myth of the highest caliber. I give below one paragraph as a sample. It is a pity that Whitehead believed he was elaborating a properly scientific cosmology:

“The aboriginal data in terms of which the pattern weaves itself are the aspects of shapes, of sense-objects, and of other eternal objects whose self-identity is not dependent on the flux of things. Wherever such objects have ingression into the general flux, they interpret events, each to the other. They are here in the perceiver; but, as perceived by him, they convey for him something of the total flux which is beyond himself. The subject-object relation takes its origin in the double rôle of these eternal

objects. They are modifications of the subject, but only in their character of conveying aspects of other subjects in the community of the universe. Thus no individual subject can have independent reality, since it is a prehension of limited aspects of subjects other than itself.” (p.177.)

Whitehead after giving an account of his organic conception of the world in terms of psychology and physiology says that it is equally possible to arrive at this conception from the fundamental notions of physics, and that by reason of his own studies in mathematics and mathematical physics he had in fact arrived at his convictions in this way. (p.178.) Mainstream mathematical physicists are content with their abstractions and equations. Whitehead personifies the abstractions and equations. This is mythologizing. The mathematical physicists ignore his mythologizing as it is nothing to them. The philosophers find his mythology idiotic. They do not realize that that is true of all metaphysics since all metaphysics is essentially mythology.

*Science and the Modern World* ends with the three chapters “God,” “Religion and Science,” and “Requisites for Social Progress.” I take up the theme “God” later in this essay. We find Whitehead’s affirmation of spirituality not in his concept of God but in his concept of religion. For Whitehead religion is the communion of a person with her or his inner reality. It is a pity that Whitehead’s deep mystic awareness of that inner reality remains outside Whitehead’s metaphysics.

The chapter on “Religion and Science” was primarily an emotional plea for peace between two factions to both of which he had an emotional attachment. But Whitehead would not be Whitehead if he did not turn the emotional plea into an occasion for insightful remarks on the proper conduct of thought. The closing pages of the chapter are a projection of what Whitehead was to present in the book that followed, *Religion in the making*. In fact, the four Lowell Lectures contained in the book *Religion in the Making* were delivered the year following that in which the lectures forming the main substance of *Science and the Modern World* were given, so naturally there is continuity even though

Whitehead states in the preface that the two books are independent.

I sum up the problem of science and religion thus: The term religion is used in two distinct and incompatible senses. (1) Religion as primitive cosmology and eschatology is completely opposed to science and is necessarily and terminally demolished by science. (2) Religion as what a person does with her or his solitariness—to adopt Whitehead’s apt definition—has nothing to do with science. It is a person’s internal life and is purely subjective lying completely beyond the jurisdiction of objective science.

Integrity of thought is the hallmark of a genuine philosopher. Whitehead rounds up *Science and the Modern World* with the chapter on “Requisites for Social Progress.” I have repeatedly insisted that philosophy proper cannot contribute directly to the solution of the practical problems of human life. Whitehead in the chapter “Requisites for Social Progress” says things of ripe wisdom, things our ailing humanity has great need to heed. It is the wisdom of a mind matured and refined by philosophical reflection. But this wisdom is not derived from philosophical principles, nor is it arrived at by philosophical reasoning. Hence, I reiterate what I have often affirmed: philosophy works on the individual; at its best it gives us a mature human mind, alive to life and to other human lives, alert and ready to fight prejudice, and to question all presuppositions and probe all possibilities, but not provided with any ready-made scheme of thought; and this is not a defect but the greatest merit of all. And philosophy is not alone in working these good effects on the human individual. Good literature and good art and good society work to the same end.



## RELIGION IN THE MAKING

In *Religion in the Making* Whitehead follows the longing of the human soul expressing its “devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow.” That might be the religion of a Socrates, of a Hallaj, of an Eckhart, of a Giordano Bruno. Unfortunately it is recognized neither by the followers of institutional religions nor by the descendants of the Giants of Plato’s allegory, our modern naturalists and materialist atheists. It would be too much to hope that a change of phrase may win over the Giants, still I wish we could avoid using the term ‘religion’ in philosophical discussion. But it is hard to find a satisfactory alternative. I have tried speaking of ‘spirituality’ but still, the religionists are not content with it and the others find it an empty sound.

In *Religion in the Making* religion is essentially an inward thing. Although Whitehead starts by speaking of justification “for belief in doctrines of religion,” we soon find the justification with which he is concerned is purely an internal thing. “Religion is force of belief cleansing the inward parts. For this reason the primary religious virtue is sincerity, a penetrating sincerity” (p.15). This is confirmed by his oft-repeated dictum: “Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.” When he defines religion “on its doctrinal side” as “a system of general truths,” that is because he intends to deal with the human phenomenon of religion historically. He explicitly states: “Collective enthusiasms, revivals, institutions, churches, rituals, bibles, codes of behavior, are the trappings of religion, its passing forms” (p.17). But I do not want to comment extensively on this remarkable book, so rich in pregnant thought that it is impossible to do it justice within the limits of this essay. I will only point out points relevant to my theme, Whitehead’s concept of reality.

Whitehead seeks some direct intuition into the ultimate character of the universe (p.59), but wants to ground such an intuition in reason, since “reason is the safeguard of the objectivity of religion” (p.64). An appeal to an intuition “merely experienced in exceptional moments” does not have “general

evidential force” (p.65). But he finds that an intuition is capable of being universalized. “The universalization of what is discerned in a particular instance is the appeal to a general character inherent in the nature of things” (p.67). Apparently this is for Whitehead the same as the intuition of an arithmetical ‘truth.’ I do not agree with Whitehead’s view that universalization discloses “a general character inherent in the nature of things.” This is related to Whitehead’s conception of philosophy as cosmology. In my philosophy such intuitions (I prefer to call them insights) do not discover traits inherent in things but give us patterns that, applied to things, infuse meaning into things. This is the essence of Plato’s doctrine of forms and it is what is implied in Kant’s assertion that ‘ $5+7=12$ ’ is not an analytical statement but a synthetic *a priori* judgment.

At this point there follows a paragraph of such beauty that I do not have the heart to disfigure it. I quote Whitehead’s own words:

“This intuition is not the discernment of a form of words, but of a type of character. It is characteristic of the learned mind to exalt words. Yet mothers can ponder many things in their hearts which their lips cannot express. These many things, which are thus known, constitute the ultimate religious evidence, beyond which there is no appeal” (p.67).

The “ultimate religious evidence, beyond which there is no appeal” is the experience known to all mystics and that is purely a subjective state. It does not discover any objective factuality but reveals the individual person’s inner reality.

In Section V of Lecture III Whitehead gives a perfect expression of the notion of creativity which I find in complete agreement with the fundamental principle of my philosophy. Unfortunately, in Whitehead’s metaphysical analyses this does not come out so clearly:

“Thus the epochal occasion has two sides. On one side it is a mode of creativity bringing together the universe. This side is the occasion as the cause of itself, its own creative act. ...

“On the other side, the occasion is the creature. The creature is that one emergent fact. This fact is the self-value of the creative act. But there are not two actual entities, the creativity and the creature. There is only one entity which is the self-creating creature” (pp.101-2).

This agrees explicitly with things I have written. But there is a difference. Whitehead is giving an account of an aspect of the cosmos. I give expression to the act as experienced in the creativity of intelligent humanity. I do not claim to say anything of the actual objective world.

Whitehead speaks of “a physical occasion of blind perceptivity.” This of course follows from Whitehead’s doctrine of prehension, but to me it is unintelligible. I say that I cannot think of any being, any existence, devoid of intelligence, but I insist that I cannot conceive in what sense or in what way ‘inanimate’ things are endowed with mind. All our objective knowledge is of phenomena; I know only one noumenon, my inner reality, and by empathy I feel that other persons are noumena – also, in a way, other living things or at any rate the higher animals.

The upshot of Section V of Lecture III, “Value and the Purpose of God,” is that Whitehead accepts a form of the concept of God as immanent. As I said above, I deal with the concept of God in a special section below.

“Science,” says Whitehead, “suggests a cosmology; and whatever suggests a cosmology, suggests a religion” (p.141). This is what I have been harping on for many years. Our ideas give us the world we live in and the kind of life we live. Where I differ with Whitehead is that whereas Whitehead believes that we somehow ‘find’ these ideas which he thus imbues with some

objectivity, I hold that we create these ideas for which we cannot claim any objectivity. We live in dreams produced by the human mind and these dreams are for us the reality, the only reality, and all the reality, that we ever know. All else is transient shadow.

In the closing lecture Whitehead returns—if only in passing—to criticizing the paltry cosmology produced by modern science with its life-negating religion that today, much more than in Whitehead’s day, is leading humanity to its final doom.

Whitehead says that “we know more than can be formulated in one finite systematized scheme of abstractions” (p.143), and in more than one place stresses that no formulation of dogma is final. This agrees with my insistence that our unfathomable, ineffable, inner reality cannot be contained in any determinate formulation of thought.

In Chapter X of Part II of *Process and Reality* Whitehead says: “The best rendering of integral experience, expressing its general form divested of irrelevant details, is often to be found in the utterances of religious aspiration. One of the reasons of the thinness of so much modern metaphysics is its neglect of this wealth of expression of ultimate feeling” (p.208). Whitehead wanted to wed our insight into our inner reality with the objectivity of scientific knowledge. This is a vain dream. The fault of our scientists is not that they fail to give expression to inner reality but that they think the outer actuality is all there is, and thus obliterate our inner reality.

In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead says that “religion is concerned with our reactions of purpose and emotion due to our personal measure of intuition into the ultimate mystery of the universe” (p.157). But what is the source or the nature of these intuitions? Are they intimations from without or emanations from within? Perhaps ultimately this question is meaningless, because the without and the within are both fictions, abstractions from the experiential totality in which I am part of the total continuum that is the only actual world I know. And when the intuition, be it intimation or emanation—relatively dim and confused, as all such

intuitions necessarily are—is invested with finality, it turns into enslaving superstition.

## PROCESS AND REALITY

I do not expect to comment at length here on *Process and Reality* although it is commonly regarded as Whitehead's *magnum opus*. There are two reasons for my not giving much space to *Process and Reality* in this essay. First, I have commented extensively on it in *Quest of Reality*, both in the chapter devoted to Whitehead and throughout the book and I do not want to repeat what I said there except where necessary. Secondly, the major concepts of Whitehead's cosmology—with one important exception—had already been introduced in *Science and the Modern World* and I have commented on them in dealing with that leading work of Whitehead's. The exception I refer to is the concept of duration, which is introduced in *Process and Reality* and developed fully in *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of thought*.

With all its wealth of learning, its astute analyses, and its sophisticated conceptual constructions, Whitehead's *Process and Reality* remains at par with Plato's *Timaeus*. We can only say of it what Whitehead himself said of the *Timaeus*: "If it be read as an allegory, it conveys profound truth." Plato had the merit of knowing what he was doing; he claimed to give us no more than a *muthos*. Since to me all cosmology, indeed all metaphysics, is imaginative ideal construction, I am not concerned with scrutinizing the details of Whitehead's majestic conceptual edifice. I am only interested in the creative metaphysical concepts inasmuch as they confer intelligibility on the chaos of our experiential givennesses.

Whitehead's enthusiasm for Plato's Receptacle on the ground that "at the present moment, physical science is nearer to it than at any period since Plato's death" (*Adventures of Ideas*, 192-3) follows from Whitehead's misconception of the nature of metaphysical thinking. Likewise, Whitehead's vehement

rejection of Plato's World-Soul in the *Timaeus* (id., p.166) is based on a misconception. The World-Soul is not a 'transcendent emanation.' It is the intelligent *dunamis* within the world. It is odd how negligible a part mind or intelligence plays in Whitehead's system. This is the fault of Whitehead's British empiricist legacy.

When Whitehead in his "Categories of Existence" insists that 'actual entities' and 'eternal objects' have a certain extreme finality, I take it that he means this in opposition to the abstractions of science. He means to affirm that the immediate presentations of our living experience and the forms under which we think our experiential presentations are the real things, not the abstractions of physics or chemistry or even mathematics. (Of course Whitehead's usage of the term 'reality' is in flat contradiction to my usage. See Chapter IX, "Reality," in *Quest of Reality*.)

Whitehead's failure with Kant is not that he failed to understand Kant's theory but that he failed to understand Kant's intention. Whitehead was trying to build up an empirical analysis of the objective world and thought that was what Kant meant to do. But Kant was trying to answer the epistemological question: What justifies us in trusting our (scientifically well-founded) judgments about the objective world? Hume had flatly denied that we have any justification, and Kant's answer to Hume was that our judgments of the objective world do not tell us what the world is like but what our minds determine that the world should be like. That was the essence of Kant's 'Copernican revolution.' Whitehead can only analyse the world as the human mind has decreed it should be like.

In the paper "Uniformity and Contingency" (*Essays in Science and Philosophy*, p.100) Whitehead, after quoting a passage from Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, remarks: "I wonder whether this was one of the passages which awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber. He certainly accepts the argument by his doctrine of space and time as forms of intuition." I think this clearly shows how Whitehead misunderstands Kant. Kant's

forms of intuition cannot be identified with, or equated with, Hume's impressions, nor are they the same as Hume's ideas of reflection. Hume's impressions come to the mind from outside the mind and the ideas of reflection are mere replicas of those impressions. Kant's forms of intuition are cast by the mind onto the data of experience.

Whitehead clearly defines one of the two errors that have done grave harm to philosophy: "Philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thought" (*Process and Reality*, p.8). But in his own work he fully exemplifies the other error which may be even more damaging than the first, the error of expecting 'speculative philosophy' to give us knowledge of the world. Whitehead earlier in the same section from which I quoted the above statement says that, in a sense, "philosophy has advanced from Plato onwards." This sounds like saying that poetry has advanced from Homer onwards. For me, philosophy is essentially poetry; it is not cumulative; it develops but does not advance; it does not give us knowledge; it does not give us deductive certainty; its rationality is aesthetic, consisting in coherence, consistency and intelligibility. (Whitehead himself elsewhere says as much and in so many words.)

Whitehead's genre of philosophy is good, raising the generalities of science to new heights, but there can be no "final generalities," and the generalities reached will always be abstractions and fictions. Whitehead errs in keeping too closely to the scientific model. He demands of philosophy "the gradual elaboration of categoreal schemes ... There may be rival schemes, inconsistent among themselves ... It will then be the purpose of research to conciliate the differences" (p.8). But in fairness to Whitehead it must be admitted that he never allows himself to be fooled by the chimera of finality in philosophical thinking: "Rationalism is an adventure in the clarification of thought, progressive and never final" (p.9).

Whitehead holds that ‘actual entities’ (or ‘actual occasions,’ elsewhere ‘events’) “are the final things of which the world is made up” (p.18). I venture to say that this is badly expressed even from Whitehead’s standpoint. These are not ‘final real things’ but are the things given with immediacy in our living experience. And when we probe these things, what do we find? Only fleeting shadows. In fact, Whitehead’s prime concern is not to assert that these things are final, but that these things are for us the live immediate presentations of our living experience, that being the point of his censuring of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. Whitehead continues: “There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real.” But that is exactly what we have to do. The actual occasion is always passing away. The real thing is not the thing that passes away but the experience experiencing the passing away, or more truly, the agent, the mind, that experiences the experience. My objection is that Whitehead fails to lay emphasis on the subject as what is ‘really real.’ But Whitehead remedies the fault by affirming creativity as an ultimate notion involved in all being.

Whitehead opposes Kant’s ‘First Analogy of Experience.’ “In the philosophy of organism it is not ‘substance’ which is permanent, but ‘form’” (p.29). But ‘form’ is only permanent for the thinking mind, for reason. No form in actuality lasts; the actuality endures; in enduring it is perpetually changing form. Plato in his late period saw that his early insistent emphasis on the permanence of form conflicted with the reality of life. That is the gist of the criticism of the ‘Friends of the Forms’ in the *Sophist*. Whitehead adopted Plato’s Forms in the version Plato early gave expression to but always found problematic and finally censured in the *Sophist*.

“Creativity is another rendering of the Aristotelian matter and of the modern ‘neutral stuff’” (p.31). This apparently agrees with “God is the primordial creature” and it shows what I find wrong with Whitehead’s conception of ‘creativity.’ Perhaps that comes from Whitehead’s deeply-rooted empiricism: for him what is real has to be objective, which is exactly what my whole philosophy is intended to overturn.



Any doctrine of perception is an ideal (theoretical) representation of the experiential immediacy of living experience. It is never definitively true, but it can no more be false than the blind man's assertion that an elephant is a long pliable tube. Whitehead's realism is in no better position; it cannot transcend the experiential immediacy except by an act of faith, Santayana's animal faith. Whitehead blames Descartes for "paving the way for Kant, and for the degradation of the world into mere appearance" (p.49). I do not see how Kant's position can be evaded and I regard Whitehead's failure or refusal to acknowledge Kant's view as constituting Whitehead's basic metaphysical fault. Plato in the *Theaetetus*, starting from the definition of knowledge as perception, fuses the Heraclitian flux with the Protagorian relativity to picture all perceptible things as fleeing nonentities. It may be that Whitehead's realism is related to his fear that if we accede to subjectivism we have no way of escaping solipsism. Thus in Pt. II, Ch. VI.Sect. V, he says: "If experience be not based upon an objective content, there can be no escape from a solipsist subjectivism" (p.152). I do not admit this. I am aware of myself as part of the objective continuum which comprehends me and which I do not comprehend. As for the reality of other minds, I can only repeat what I said in my *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, 2008: "I know other persons in the only manner in which persons can be known. I know them as I know reality; I know them by their creative activity, by their autonomy; I know them in love given and received." (See also "Subjectivism and Solipsism" included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009.)

In his long, too too long, discussion of perception and sensation Whitehead forgets his own central doctrine, that what is real is the immediate occasion, the total immediate event – all the rest is abstraction. I am convinced that all the controversies around theories of perception are quite outside the proper range of philosophy.

Whitehead gives an intriguing exemplification of Plato's injunction that dialectic must constantly destroy its grounds. Speaking of Locke's doctrine of 'power' and Hume's "demonstration that no such doctrine is compatible with a purely

sensationalist philosophy,” he writes: “Every philosophical school in the course of its history requires two presiding philosophers. One of them under the influence of the main doctrines of the school should survey experience with some adequacy, but inconsistently. The other philosopher should reduce the doctrines of the school to a rigid consistency; he will thereby effect a *reductio ad absurdum*” (p.57). Thus Plato is vindicated: reason in its dialectical exercise must always destroy its own grounds.

Whitehead says: “The philosophy of organism is the inversion of Kant’s philosophy” (p.88). It is true that we can give an account of knowledge either in Kantian terms or in the terms of Whitehead’s philosophy. But there comes the rub. If I choose not to submit to radical solipsism, I have to say that I am aware of the continuum extending beyond my individuality. The objective continuum I feel subsists somehow. I can imagine that it subsists in the same way as my own being subsists, as issuing from creative intelligence. This I can imagine, but do I know it? All I know is what is given in my experience. Apart from my inner reality, all the rest is phenomena. I suppose—I am constrained to suppose—that beyond (or beneath or whatever metaphor you choose) there is a noumenon or there are noumena. I am not justified in uttering a single word beyond this. This, according to my understanding, is the position of the transcendental philosophy, although Kant himself at certain points transgresses the limits his system sets for him. Whitehead, in my opinion, simply ignores the problem and chooses to speak dogmatically of what we cannot know. I think I would have Wittgenstein on my side in this.

I have more than once before commented on the paragraph where Whitehead weighs the merits of Plato’s *Timaeus* and Newton’s *Scholium* (p.93). I will not repeat here what I said before, but I will ask: What makes the *Timaeus* of such significance for Whitehead? It is primarily the conception of the world as an organic whole, as a living animal. But this is a philosophical idea, a myth as Plato himself describes it, that you cannot turn into science. Newton himself, had his attention been

drawn to it, might have loved it, but he could never fuse it with his theory which had to remain at the level of abstraction decried by Whitehead.

Whitehead has to admit that his argument about the nature of life leads to the conclusion “that life is a characteristic of ‘empty space’ and not of space ‘occupied’ by any corpuscular society. ... Life lurks in the interstices of each living cell, and in the interstices of the brain” (pp.105-6). I see this as testimony that the essentially reductionist method of his cosmology necessarily fails to explain life as it necessarily fails to explain mind or creativity or any reality. We have to admit that realities, creations of the human mind that infuse meaning and value into the givennesses of our experience, are realities to us and for us that nevertheless have to remain inexplicable and ineffable mysteries for us. We cannot explain life, we cannot explain knowledge, we cannot explain beauty. With Socrates we have to remain content with saying: It is by Life that all living things are alive; it is by Knowledge that all knowing minds know and all known things are known; it is by Beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful. Whitehead, on the one hand failing to acknowledge that life and mind pertain to a distinct order of reality, and on the other hand unwilling to acquiesce in his empiricist friends’ banishment of life and mind, is reduced to finding them ‘lurking’ in inaccessible ‘interstices.’

In a revealing paragraph Whitehead writes:

“Hume’s polemic respecting causation is, in fact, one prolonged, convincing argument that pure presentational immediacy does not disclose any causal influence, either whereby one actual entity is constitutive of the percipient actual entity, or whereby one perceived actual entity is constitutive of another perceived actual entity. The conclusion is that, in so far as concerns the disclosure by presentational immediacy, actual entities in the contemporary universe are causally independent of each other” (p.123).

How does Whitehead make actual entities dependent on each other? By mentally conceiving an organic unity that binds them together, which, to my mind, is just saying in another way what Kant said in his transcendental philosophy. But it might be said that Whitehead finds the unity in the immediate occasion, the event. Even so, I say that he only finds the unity by analogy to the unity of our own creative intelligence, which again amounts to saying with Socrates and Plato that perceptibles are only intelligible by virtue of forms engendered in the mind, by the mind. Let me put it differently: we find the organic unity of the event (the ‘unison of immediate becoming’) in duration; duration is not an entity perceived, not a Humian impression nor a Humian idea, but is a creative unity experienced; duration is only real for a creative intelligence which a human being only knows immediately in her or his inner reality.

Again Whitehead says: “A complete region, satisfying the principle of ‘concurrent unison’ will be called a ‘duration.’ A duration is a cross-section of the universe ...” (p.125). A ‘concurrent unison’ is an act; an act only issues from an intelligent agent; it is only a ‘cross-section of the universe’ for a mind, for Whitehead’s mind, your mind, my mind.

The example given by Whitehead on several occasions of an image reflected in a mirror, when “we see the same sight as an image behind the mirror” (p.126) – does not this confirm Kant’s view that space is a mode of sensibility or a form of intuition contributed by the mind?

In an inspired sentence Whitehead says that “we finish a sentence *because* we have begun it” (p.129). To me this points to the purposiveness of creative intelligence. But when Whitehead goes on to say: “We are governed by stubborn fact,” I find the terminology, at least, of this statement, incongruous with my outlook.

Whitehead takes pains to ground his philosophy of organism in the philosophies of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. This is needless and pointless. Whitehead found inspiration in those

philosophers only by putting new meanings in their general notions. This is what all original philosophers do in philosophizing. An original philosopher misinterprets, distorts, falsifies his predecessors, those he professes to follow even more so than those he explicitly rejects.

Whitehead says: “[Hume’s] very scepticism is nothing but the discovery that there is something in the world which cannot be expressed in analytic propositions. ... Hume discovered that an actual entity is at once a process, and is atomic, so that in no sense is it the sum of its parts. Hume proclaimed the bankruptcy of morphology” (p.140). This is what Analytic Philosophers refuse to see. – I suppose that by ‘morphology’ Whitehead means what we have come to refer to as ‘reductionism.’ [Apparently ‘morphology’ has two meanings for Whitehead, the morphology he criticizes and his own morphological theory.]

Whitehead says: “In the philosophy of organism ‘the soul’ as it appears in Hume, and the ‘mind’ as it appears in Locke and Hume, are replaced by the phrases ‘the actual entity,’ and ‘the actual occasion,’ these phrases being synonymous”(p.141). In replacing the subjective inner reality with the actual presentation Whitehead shares the error of all empiricism; he changes the subjective into an objective entity. Whitehead’s slighting of ‘consciousness’ is related to this. His neglect of the subjective dimension is what makes his cosmology stop short of becoming a proper metaphysics.

Whitehead details his reasons for rejecting Santayana’s doctrine of ‘animal faith’ and ends by saying: “A fourth reason for the rejection of the doctrine is that the way is thereby opened for a rational scheme of cosmology in which a final reality is identified with acts of experience” (p.143). What is for Whitehead a reason for rejecting Santayana’s doctrine is for me a reason for welcoming it.

Whitehead asserts that the philosophy of organism follows Descartes in the assumption of a multiplicity of actual entities (pp.144-5). One could wonder, how this can agree with seeing

the world (nature, the cosmos) as an organism? But Whitehead did not hold the *Timaeus* view of the world as a single living organism. That view he rejects in rejecting monism. And that is another reason why Whitehead's cosmology could not support a proper metaphysics. I think Whitehead inconsistent when he goes on to say: "There can only be evidence of a world of actual entities, if the immediate actual entity discloses them as essential to its own composition" (p.145). To follow this consistently is to lead to a view of the universe as a totally unified process. To my mind, this is in harmony with the views of Spinoza and Hegel and Bradley. Whitehead continues: "The organic philosophy interprets experience as meaning the 'self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many'" (p.145). This is the metaphysical halfway house Whitehead chooses to dwell in. This is what he calls relativity as affirmed further on in Section III where we read: "This principle of relativity is the axiom by which the ontological principle is rescued from issuing in an extreme monism" (p.148). Whitehead is constrained to this position by his insistence on building a scientific cosmology that takes account of facts. It is good to emphasize the relative independence of the actual occasion, but this should not prevent us seeing that ultimately all separation and all independence is transitory, the many merge in the One. As Plato said, it is the mark of a philosopher to see the many in the one and to see the one in the many.

Whitehead makes much of the distinction or opposition between 'potentiality' and 'reality.' To my mind this distinction or opposition is only relevant on the conceptual plane. In other words, the distinction is logical, not metaphysical. In reality, in the real world, there is no potentiality.

Whitehead takes Hume to task "because, with Locke, he misconceived his problem to be the analysis of mental operations. He should have conceived it as the analysis of operations constituent of actual entities" (p.151). He finds Kant guilty of the same fault. But Locke, Hume, and Kant, in different ways, wanted, with Socrates, to examine things *en tois logos* and not *en tois ergois*. In that they were right: they were doing

philosophy, not science. Thus Whitehead misinterprets Locke and Hume and fails to understand Kant. His criticism of 'subsequent empiricists' is only partly fair. They commit the fault opposite to Whitehead's: Whitehead in philosophizing presumes to do science; the empiricists in doing science presume to philosophize. Kant's transcendental system is essentially an epistemology. He has no ontology and does not presume to give a complete metaphysics, since he considers the noumenon to lie outside the scope of pure reason.

"The organic philosophy holds that consciousness only arises in a late derivative phase of complex integrations" (p.162). I have always been wary of the term 'consciousness.' As here defined, this is human (or animal) awareness of, let us say, surroundings. To me, there is a deeper intelligence that I conceive as an original dimension of all active being and all life and that we know immediately in creative activity, moral, literary, and artistic. It is a mistake to confuse this deeper intelligence with practical thinking and low-level awareness.

Whitehead sums up the exposition of his 'reformed subjectivist principle' by affirming that "apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness" (p.167). I find this somewhat baffling. I wholeheartedly agree that "apart from the experiences of subjects" there is no actuality, no existent, no 'reality' in Whitehead's sense of the word. But having asserted that apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, Whitehead is happy with the experienced actuality and pays little or no attention to the experiencing subject. I would say that apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing out there, but there is all the reality in here.

Whitehead's criticism of empiricism is incisive and just. But it is not right to say that Kant committed the same error as Hume. (See Pt. II, Ch. VIII, Sect. III, p.173, and also the opening of Sect. V, p.178.) Hume was concerned with the veracity of perceptions, and—helped by Berkeley's reduction of Locke's sensationalism to its logical consequence—concluded that

impressions of sensation arose in the soul from unknown causes. But if Hume erred in this, as Whitehead was concerned to show, he did not err in saying that in the immediacy of experience we do not *perceive* any causal connections. Causal connections may be amply exemplified in our empirical experience but they are not *given* in our experience as other experiential presentations are given. Kant wanted to rescue the causal connection. Kant was not, like Hume, concerned with the veracity of perceptions, but with the validity of our conceptual judgments. He therefore formulates his problem thus: “How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?” How can we connect together phenomena that are not experientially connected and bind them by a bond that is not given in our empirical experience? Whitehead fails to see that Kant’s problem was different from Hume’s: it is not right to impute Hume’s error to Kant.

Whitehead is as much confined to the objective as the empiricists he criticizes. I am not contradicting myself when I assert that Whitehead remains within the British empiricist tradition while I applaud his criticism of empiricism. In the same way I side with Whitehead when he criticizes reductionism (‘morphology’) but also assert that his analytical approach to cosmology is basically reductionist. Reductionism and empiricism are two sides of the same coin. And it is because Whitehead’s outlook is basically empiricist and reductionist—in spite of his criticism of certain aspects or modes of reductionism—that he can articulate an impressive cosmology but cannot present a proper metaphysics.

The philosophy of process summed up in a single sentence: “The universe is ... a creative advance into novelty” (p.222). When a couple of lines above this Whitehead says: “All actual entities share with God this characteristic of self-causation,” I find myself in full agreement, but when he next says: “For this reason every actual entity also shares with God the characteristic of transcending all other actual entities, including God,” I must confess that I do not understand what is meant by this.



The philosophy of process may best be summed up as the representation of the cosmos as a “creative advance into novelty.” But in working out the details of his cosmology Whitehead, who remained too much of a scientist, gives much more emphasis to uniformity than to creativity.

I will insist on playing the child who cried, “The Emperor has no clothes on!” Whitehead’s cosmological articulations are metaphors run berserk that he presents as metaphysical abstractions, which indeed they are, if we confess that all of our metaphysical abstractions are no more than arbitrary metaphors, with no more substance and no more permanence than the camels, giraffes, and squirrels that a child marks out in the sailing clouds. Philosophers have yet to learn the lesson of the *Parmenides*, whether we say the One is or the One is not; the One is Many or the One is not many; the Many are or the Many are not; the Many are One or the Many are not One, “it will seem that both the One and the Many, will be, both in relation to themselves and to each other, all things and no-thing” (*Parmenides*, 166c).

In Part IV, Ch, III, Sect. I, Whitehead says that the elemental definitions in Greek geometry led to “a muddle ... between ‘forms’ and concrete physical things” (p.302). The geometers were not concerned with metaphysical questions; the definitions were good enough for their purposes. Zeno showed that a muddle arises if we assume that the geometrical concepts have metaphysical validity. Whitehead blames Plato because although he (according to Heath) “objected to recognizing points as a separate class of things at all,” he did not go further to make the same objection “to all the geometrical entities” (p.302). Whitehead concludes: “He [Plato] wanted ‘forms’ and he obtained new physical entities.” I don’t think the censure is justified. Plato’s doctrine stems from the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible and has nothing to do with the assumed or real geometrical muddle.

Whitehead’s discussion of geometrical definitions clearly shows that notions which we easily take to be ultimate, are

conceptual constructs based on assumptions that have to be dialectically destroyed as Plato enjoined in the *Republic*.

I quote the following paragraph (from Pt. IV, Ch. III, Sect. V) in full because it shows where and how I cannot go along with Whitehead's conception of philosophy:

“The Cartesian subjectivism in its application to physical science became Newton's assumption of individually existent physical bodies, with merely external relationships. We diverge from Descartes by holding that what he has described as primary *attributes* of physical bodies are really the forms of internal relationships *between* actual occasions, and *within* actual occasions. Such a change of thought is the shift from materialism to organism, as the basic idea of physical science” (p.309).

I would say that what Descartes “described as primary *attributes* of physical bodies” are conceptual constructs (abstractions) which Whitehead replaces with more sophisticated conceptual constructs that nevertheless are still abstractions because Whitehead insists on giving an objective account of the phenomena, disregarding the underlying noumena to which, as Kant said, we have no access except in the unique case of our moral experience. I give ‘moral’ a wider sense than it has with Kant and say that our only access to a noumenon is in our experience of intelligent creativity, in poetry and art and the spontaneity of love.

Whitehead opens Chapter IV of Part IV with these sentences: “There is nothing in the real world which is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling: it promotes feeling, and it is felt. Also there is nothing which belongs merely to the privacy of feeling of one individual actuality. All origination is private. But what has been thus originated, publicly pervades the world” (p.310). I endorse this statement implicitly, but I differ with Whitehead in that, while he expresses this dogmatically as applying to the ‘real’ world, I say that it is a myth, a metaphorical statement, that confers intelligibility on the dumb givennesses of

our experience, and that we have no right to ascribe it to the world, however much the world may good-naturedly conform to expectations we form and predictions we make, prodded by that myth. As I see it, all that Whitehead says about prehensions, concrescence, creativity, feelings, the transmission of feelings, etc., is modeled on our purposive (moral) activity and creative (artistic) activity. We have no other model for reality and, to my mind, we know no other reality.

It is revealing that Whitehead again and again waves aside “consciousness, or even that approach to consciousness which we associate with life” (p.311) as of little importance. I shy away from the term ‘consciousness’ for reasons of my own, but it is obvious that what Whitehead says of consciousness applies equally to mind. In this Whitehead discounts the testimony of the Romantic poets he often quotes with approval in other contexts. I, equally with those poets, cannot conceive of any being divorced of intelligence. It is no consolation that Whitehead finds feeling all over the universe. I find such feeling equivalent to Schopenhauer’s blind Will. To me Being is only ultimately intelligible as intelligent Love.

The notion of duration is as fundamental to the philosophy of organism as the notion of process. Flux and duration are bound together in a dialectical polarity. There can be no flux where there is no duration and there can be no duration where there is no ongoing becoming. But until very close to the end of *Process and Reality* the notion of ‘duration’ does not feature prominently in Whitehead’s system. Although on page 320 we are told that a duration “is a complete locus of actual occasions ‘in unison of becoming’ or in ‘concurrent unison,’ this is equated with “the old-fashioned ‘present state of the world.’ This is expanded on page 322 to: “A duration is a complete set of actual occasions, such that all members are mutually contemporary one with the other. This property is expressed by the statement that the members enjoy ‘unison of immediacy.’” Still this is far below the live vibrancy that the notion assumes in *Adventures of Ideas* where the transcendence of time in duration is brought out clearly. (See my *Quest of Reality*, Chapter XV, “Time, Duration,

and Eternity.”) When Whitehead says that “in so far as Bergson ascribes the ‘spatialization’ of the world to a distortion introduced by the intellect, he is in error,” I think Whitehead simply fails to understand Bergson because he mistakenly assumes that Bergson was interested in the same questions he was interested in.

The intricate elaboration in *Process and Reality* of the concepts presented in *Science and the Modern World* does not, in my opinion, add much of value. It is the fundamental concepts of process and of organism and the notion of the ‘event’ (under any of its various names) as the ‘real’ thing – these are the valuable elements in the philosophy of process that enable us to see our world with new eyes, as any original philosophy does. Apart from the introduction of the notion of duration, I do not think that *Process and Reality* added much in this respect. The detailed elaboration of the cosmology may be interesting but I think that Whitehead does not sufficiently recognize that his system is just one theoretical representation among other such theoretical representations, none of which can claim either truth or finality. Unless and until philosophers realize that they are engaged in producing imaginative visions of reality, philosophy will remain subject to Hume’s sentence: “Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

## ADVENTURES OF IDEAS

Perhaps we can with reason describe *Adventures of Ideas* as Whitehead’s philosophy of history. Early in the Introduction he presents two notions representing two forces that sway the course of human civilization: (1) “compulsion” (or “violence”), the disruptive and destructive force; (2) “persuasion,” the force of “articulated beliefs issuing from aspirations, and issuing into aspirations.” This force finds itself at odds with “custom,” the conservative, negative force of existing social institutions. Towards the end of the Introduction

Whitehead says that the topic of the book “is limited to the story of the energizing of two or three ideas, whose effective entertainment constitutes civilization” (p.15). But a great mind can see “a World in a Grain of Sand” as Blake tells us, and so Whitehead, working on those “two or three ideas,” covers the whole compass of philosophy.

In Part I Whitehead’s discussion of what we may call the problem of civilization is rich and profound, but here I am concerned only with his cosmological outlook. In Section VII of Chapter III Whitehead says: “We can classify the topics of physical science under four headings: (1) The true and real things which endure, (2) The true and real things which occur, (3) The abstract things which recur, (4) The Laws of Nature” (p.44) It is clear that Whitehead gives ‘physical science’ a much wider scope than most physicists recognize; for him it covers everything he considers “true and real.” The four ‘topics,’ although distinct and not to be confused or mixed, have one common character: they are all in the objective sphere or relate to the objective sphere, that being all that is real for Whitehead, the world out there. Even the ‘abstract things which recur,’ which are otherwise referred to as ‘forms’ or ‘eternal objects’ are only considered as they are given in objective experience.

A little further on in the same section Whitehead finds those who hold “that religion and science can never clash because they deal with different topics” (p.45) are entirely mistaken. I too think those worthies entirely mistaken, but not for the same reasons as Whitehead. Whitehead adds: “In this world at least, you cannot tear apart minds and bodies.” Again I say that is unquestionably true, even without the qualifying phrase “In this world at least”: mind and body form one organic indivisible whole. Yet that is not where those who hold “that religion and science ... deal with different topics” are mistaken. Philosophy and science are concerned with entirely different realms, not because they relate to separate or separable worlds, but because they view the one world by looking in different directions, philosophy looking within and science looking without.

I am not convinced by Whitehead's representation of Plato's position in the *Timaeus* as an attempt to reconcile the two opposed views of the Law of Nature as Immanent and as Imposed (Chapter VIII, Section II). Whitehead writes: "In the first place, Plato's cosmology includes an ultimate creator, shadowy and undefined, imposing his design upon the Universe. Secondly, the action and reaction of the internal constituents is—for Plato—the self-sufficient explanation of the flux of the world" (p.120). Here, in my opinion, Whitehead overlooks two important considerations. First, Plato's "creator" is not the same as the God of the monotheistic religions; he does not create the world but orders its primal chaos in conformity with eternal forms. Secondly, the creation story was part of the *muthos* which Plato explicitly warns us not to take too seriously. On the other hand, "the action and reaction of the internal constituents" as "the self-sufficient explanation of the flux of the world" is the fecund metaphysical insight that we have to take seriously. Whitehead gives expression to this insight when he says that "for Plato behaviour is a function of the various characters of the things concerned – the intelligent activities of indwelling souls ..." (p.121), but when further on he says: "The modern wave-theory of the atom sides with Plato ...," I cannot help being quaintly reminded of our erudite Muslim scholars who find the latest theories of physics and astrophysics anticipated by verses in the Quran. I hope that Whitehead's spirit will forgive me the blasphemous association. Whatever other faults Plato had, he was not guilty of confusing the investigation of things *en tois logois* with their investigation *en tois ergois*.

In Section VII of Chapter VIII Whitehead criticizes Leibniz' theory of windowless monads on the ground that it "renders an interconnected world of real individuals unintelligible. ... substantial thing cannot call unto substantial thing" (p.131). As opposed to that, the receptacle, "as discussed in the *Timaeus*, is the way in which Plato conceived the many actualities of the physical world as components in each other's natures" (p.132). Of course, the interconnectedness of all things is of the essence of the philosophy of organism.

I find support for my view that all understanding is the gift of forms engendered by creative intelligence in Whitehead's assertion that "Mathematics has developed, especially in recent years, by a speculative interest in types of order, without any determination of particular entities illustrative of those types. But Nature has subsequently been interpreted in terms of such mathematical laws. The conclusion seems to be, that Nature is patient of interpretation in terms of Laws which happen to interest us" (p.134). But Whitehead, having said: "There is an element of arbitrary choice in our interpretation of the geometrical character of the physical world," and having spoken of the three types of geometry, Euclidean, Elliptic, and Hyperbolic, goes on to say: "But it is an entire misconception, which has been entertained by some mathematicians, to deduce that this mathematical truth has any bearing upon the notion of the Laws of Nature as arbitrary convention." I confess that I cannot follow Whitehead's technical argument following this and in any case do not think it is of any significance for my view.

Whitehead writes: "The first step in science and philosophy has been made when it is grasped that every routine exemplifies a principle which is capable of statement in abstraction from its particular exemplifications" (p.138). I would re-state this as follows: The first step in science and philosophy has been made when we audaciously presume to fit every routine into a formula of our own creation, constituted by selecting certain particulars and excluding others of the total experiential presentation. This is the principle to which we subject subsequent exemplifications of what, until that has happened, could not even be recognized as a routine.

"The final problem is to conceive a complete [*pantelês*] fact. We can only form such a conception in terms of fundamental notions concerning the nature of reality" (p.155). The 'complete fact,' what is ultimately 'real, Plato defined as *dunamis*, Schopenhauer characterized as Will, Whitehead alternately described as Event, Actual Occasion, or Process, and I call Creative Intelligence or Intelligent Creativity. My difference with Schopenhauer and Whitehead is that they meant to speak about

the objective world outside us, while I, agreeing, as I believe, with Plato, only speak of what my mind can conceive as *to pantelôs on*.

Whitehead says that “the great minds who laid the foundations of our modern mentality ... had reason for their dissatisfaction with the traditional dogmatic theology” but finds that “they partially misconceived the grounds upon which they should base their attitude. Their true enemy was the doctrine of dogmatic finality, a doctrine which flourished and is flourishing with equal vigour throughout Theology, Science, and Metaphysics” (p.158). Whitehead is right in holding that the enemy of reason and rationality is this doctrine of dogmatic finality that Plato was concerned to fight when he insisted that dialectic should constantly destroy all hypotheses. But while I agree with Whitehead in finding “dogmatic rejection” equally in error with the misplaced “emphasis of certainty,” I think that Whitehead’s attempt to rescue Christianity (or any other religion, even Buddhism) by the appeal to history is futile. Practically it will always come to an attempt to reconcile superstition with reason. Platonic dialectic is our only hope for fighting superstition and “dogmatic finality” in science and metaphysics at the same time, and today it seems that the second task is not a whit less difficult than the first.

Plato, towards the end of his life, according to Whitehead, was convinced “that the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as a coercive agency” (p. 161). Whitehead finds this conviction spelled out in the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*, but I would not relegate the basic intuition to the late period of Plato’s life and work. Except for the specific verbal formulation, I see it clearly voiced in the early dialogues, in the affirmation of the identity of *arête* and *epistêmê*; in the *Euthyphro* pregnant question about whether divine approval is the ground or the result of moral goodness; in the notion of *tokos en tõi kalõi*, in the Form of the Good as the final reality. But the specific formulation of the beautiful doctrine of the persuasive agency as a metaphysical first principle—as “one of



the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion”—is more Whitehead’s child than Plato’s.

Whitehead cannot forgive Plato for, on turning to the world, “he can find only second-rate substitutes and never the originals” (p.163). This is so because Whitehead looks without and finds a cosmos that is what is real to him, while Plato looks within where, he believes, is the only reality we can ever know.

Whitehead’s interpretation of Plato and his interpretation of Christian theology are highly idiosyncratic (else they would not be worthy of an original thinker). It is pointless to criticize his interpretations, that would be opposing one personal interpretation to another.

“Nature changes and yet remains. The ideas declare themselves as timeless; and yet they pass on, as it were the flicker of a brightness” (p.165). These are the riddles that every genuine metaphysics tries to answer, but all the answers must be confessed mere guesses that can never penetrate the core of the mystery.

I quote below in full the closing paragraph of Chapter X:

“The task of Theology is to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions. The temporal World is the stage of finite accomplishment. We ask of Theology to express the element in perishing lives which is undying by reason of its expression of perfections proper to our finite natures. In this way we shall understand how life includes a mode of satisfaction deeper than joy or sorrow” (p.167).

I would only replace the word ‘Theology’ in this quotation with ‘Philosophy.’ Theology has had its opportunity throughout human history and has on the whole done more harm than good because it is infected with the deadly blight of all understanding: the illusion of finality.

I am not interested in discussing Whitehead's theory of knowledge. Having agreed that the immediate occasion—experiential totality in my terminology—is what is 'real,' all theory of knowledge is no more than an ideal construction of abstractions good for a specific purpose.

Nothing is just itself by itself. Plato said that in the *Theaetetus*. No entity can be in complete isolation. Whitehead says everything has a past and a future. To have a past and a future is to transcend the evanescence of finite being in becoming. This is *tokos en kalôi* and this is what is ultimately real.

"No material for the interpretation of sense is provided by the senses themselves, as they stand starkly, barely, present and immediate" (p.167). I see this as the final overthrow of Empiricism as a theory of knowledge no less than as a theory of reality. Further on Whitehead says that "in so far as we apply notions of causation to the understanding of events in nature, we must conceive these events under the general notions which apply to occasions of experience. For we can only understand causation in terms of our observations of these occasions" (p.180). I could delude myself into thinking that this agrees with what I have always insisted on by asserting that the only noumenon we know is our moral will and that the difference between Whitehead's cosmological stance and my saying that I only speak of the reality I find within me is after all a difference of emphasis. But Section XVI, immediately following, and Section XVII show that Whitehead could never free himself from the outward looking attitude of empirical science. Section XVII ends with this statement: "The mere phrase that 'physical science is an abstraction,' is a confession of philosophic failure. It is the business of rational thought to describe the more concrete fact from which that abstraction is derivable" (p.181).

Whitehead says, "Whenever a vicious dualism appears, it is by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact" (p.185 [towards the end of Chapter XI, erroneously headed 'Chapter X' in the Pelican edition]). I have been saying again and

again and again that only what is whole is real and that abstractions from the whole, useful as long as they are treated as such, become pernicious falsehoods when finality is ascribed to them.

The most original concept in Whitehead's system is the concept of the immanence of the past and the future in the present, summed up in the term 'duration.' Apart from the immanence of the past and the future in it, the present is strictly speaking nothing, sheer nothingness. The insight expressed by Whitehead in this notion of immanence is what I mean to convey by saying that all becoming is a creative act. This is the gist of the chapter on "Time, Duration, and Eternity" in my *Quest of Reality* (2013).

Whitehead's intricate, detailed definitions (in Chapter XIII for instance) do not help the intelligibility of his philosophy. In this Whitehead was yielding to the mathematician in him more than was good for him. Plato's roguish, happy-go-lucky treatment of words is more appropriate to philosophy; by the nebulosity and elusiveness of his usages, Plato the philosopher-poet gives more scope to creative philosophical understanding.

I cannot understand Whitehead when he writes: "Nature is a complex of enduring objects, functioning as subordinate elements in a larger spatial-physical society. This larger society is for us the natural universe. There is however no reason to identify it with the boundless totality of actual things" (p.200). It is this last sentence that I find puzzling. Whitehead apparently does not think that "the boundless totality of actual things" forms one whole. Perhaps this is also due to Whitehead's inability to escape the scientist in him. He is constructing a cosmology on the basis of what characteristics we empirically find in the world we happen to live in. This is our cosmos. But beyond that cosmos "the boundless totality of actual things" may contain other universes with characteristics and laws other than those pertaining to our universe. Perhaps this is good scientific thinking. But philosophy is concerned with one ultimate reality. What philosophy proper says of that reality relates to what we

can conceive as real and does not claim to be or seek to be true of the world or worlds outside us. (All of this has nothing to do with the newfangled idea of multiple universes or possible universes which I find utterly senseless and utterly useless.)

Here is another passage that is incomprehensible to me: “How far this soul [“man defined as a person”] finds a support for its existence beyond the body is – another question. The everlasting nature of God, which in a sense is non-temporal and in another sense is temporal, may establish with the soul a peculiarly intense relationship of mutual immanence. Thus in some important sense the existence of the soul may be freed from its complete dependence upon the bodily organization” (p.201). Is Whitehead here yielding to the same weakness as Kant who, in flat contradiction to his transcendental system, makes room for a transcendent God and for personal immortality? Is Whitehead likewise trying to save the personal immortality he was brought up as a child to believe in?

Whitehead’s dichotomy of appearance and reality corresponds neither to the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible, nor to Plato’s image and reality, nor to Kant’s phenomenon and noumenon, nor to Bradley’s appearance and reality. We must be careful not to confuse any of these pairs of opposites with Whitehead’s. Whitehead is concerned with something totally different; He is concerned to show that “the exclusive reliance on sense-perception promotes a false metaphysics” (p.212). This “exclusive reliance on sense-perception” was the fault of Locke and Hume and the Empiricists, not of Plato. In fact, Whitehead misunderstands what Plato means in speaking of shadows and reality. The Cave episode in the *Republic* is an allegory and Whitehead’s reference to it as Plato’s “myth of the Shadows in the Cave” reveals a misconception, for Plato is not there presenting a theory of perception. (He does this in the *Theaetetus*.)

Chapter XV, the final chapter of Part III of *Adventures of Ideas* is titled “Philosophic Method.” Since for Whitehead ‘speculative philosophy’ investigates the actual objective world,

this chapter inevitably turns out to be a methodology of scientific research more than a theory of philosophical thinking. Whitehead's maturest and profoundest thinking on philosophical thinking is to be found in *Modes of Thought*. But Whitehead, being Whitehead, speaks of "meanings miraculously revealed in great literature" (p.218), and thereby breaks down all boundaries that would partition the products of creative human intelligence.

Whitehead says that "every method is a happy simplification ... every simplification is an over-simplification ... an unguarded statement of a partial truth" (pp.213-4). This is true of all theory, scientific or philosophical. For any scientific account or philosophical statement to claim to give the truth, simply and without qualification, or to be thought to give the truth, simply and without qualification, is that deadly dogmatism that is worse than ignorance.

It is important to distinguish clearly the concept of consciousness from the concept of mind or intelligence. Consciousness and problem-solving thinking may be peculiarities of the human animal or of the 'higher' animals generally. In humans these capacities or functions are valuable tools but no more. Whitehead justly says, "Consciousness is a variable uncertain element which flickers uncertainly on the surface of experience" (p.242). When I speak of mind or intelligence as an original dimension of what is ultimately real I am thinking of the creative intelligence we know—if only intermittently, flittingly—in moral spontaneity and creative activity. I find fault with Whitehead for making little room for this in his conception of what is real.

Whitehead says, as if in a passing thought: "Of course consciousness, like everything else, is in a sense indefinable. It is just itself and must be experienced" (p.257). Whitehead had no need to cushion the statement with the diffident 'in a sense,' for this is that insight that Socrates tried all his life to open our eyes to and that Wittgenstein after long wandering arrived at.

Through Art “the mere toil for the slavish purpose of prolonging life for more toil or for mere bodily gratification, is transformed into the conscious realization of a self-contained end, timeless within time” (pp.258-9). If we take Art in a wide sense to cover all intelligent creativity, Whitehead’s words here show how humanity transcends its existential finitude and transience in the eternity of reality. (Of course I am using ‘reality’ here in a sense different from Whitehead’s.)

Whitehead’s penchant for analyzing and explaining is almost pathological. It’s a natural human weakness; perhaps the sin that drove Eve and Adam out of Paradise was not the desire for knowledge but the desire for explanation. We will continue to analyze and we will continue to seek explanations because that is as natural for us as it is natural for a child or a kitten to play. It is only when the humdrum burdens of life render us half-dead that we lose the desire for explanation as we lose the desire for play. But after all our intellectual labours, the supreme wisdom is to realize with Socrates that the beautiful is beautiful because it is beautiful, and that our analyses and explanations may serve this or that particular practical purpose but will not give us understanding, will not enable us to penetrate to the essence of a thing.

Whitehead chooses the name Peace for that Harmony of Harmonies which the sages of all times have preached, “a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, un verbalized and yet momentous in its co-ordination of values” (p.271). He devotes to this notion the final chapter of *Adventures of Ideas*, a dozen pages so rich in wisdom that, if we were to have a canonical Bible of Humanity, I would have that Bible end with this chapter. In the final chapter of *Quest of Reality*, “Humanity,” I quoted the closing paragraph of this chapter in full.

“The attainment of Truth belongs to the essence of Peace. ... There can be no secure efficacy in the Beauty which hides within itself the dislocations of falsehood” (pp.278-9). Perhaps we have here the answer to the problem of Art and Morality. Certainly art

cannot be bound by the specific codes of morality ruling at definite times and places. But when art jars with the essential values that those codes aspire to express, then the beauty presented by that art will necessarily be cracked within. At the same time it is this that secures the right of genuine art to challenge ruling codes of morality in the name of essential values. Immediately following the lines I quoted above Whitehead says: "The truth or falsehood of propositions is not directly to the point in this demand for Truth." The Truth that is an aspect of the Peace that is the Harmony of Harmonies is not to be confused with truth as agreement with actualities, which is the truth of propositions.

It seems to me that Whitehead in his doctrine of Appearance and Reality is concerned to rescue the 'reality' of the givennesses of our sense-experience. But I think that Whitehead is mistaken in thinking that in this he is opposing or correcting Kant's position. Kant is dealing with a totally different problem and Whitehead misunderstands him, and wrongs him, because he mistakenly thinks Kant is dealing with the problem he is concerned with. It is not Kant's answer to the question "How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?" that is to be denied (p.280), but it is rather Whitehead who, by remaining within the bounds of Empiricism, has no answer to the question, or, to be fair to him, has no need for an answer because he does not raise the question. Whitehead answers Hume's challenge not by an epistemological theory but by a metaphysical doctrine. He bluntly affirms: But we do know concrete actuality, we do experience the connection of things, we do transcend the succession of states of being in the duration of process. Kant on the other hand does not belie Hume. He says: Admitting that Hume is right, we can still have knowledge because our own minds produce the concepts under which things are connected. Kant's answer is epistemological, not metaphysical. (Keeping to the level of sense-perception Hume was of course right just as in the *Theaetetus* Plato shows that, keeping to the level of sense-perception, Protagoras was right.)

After presenting what Whitehead sees as his answer to the Kantian question about the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments but which I see as an answer to Hume's denial of the possibility of knowledge, Whitehead has an important paragraph which I find fully supportive of my view of the nature of philosophical thinking, what I have called the oracular nature of philosophical thinking. The paragraph anticipates the position Whitehead develops in *Modes of Thought*. I will quote the paragraph in full without further comment at this point:

“The justification for the suggestion derived from this group of factors must mainly rest on their direct elucidation of first-hand experience. They are not, and should not be, the result of an argument. For all argument must rest upon premises more fundamental than the conclusions. Discussion of fundamental notions is merely for the purpose of disclosing their coherence, their compatibility, and the specializations which can be derived from their conjunction” (p.280).

## MODES OF THOUGHT

In *Modes of Thought* (Lecture Five, p.93) Whitehead says: “The nature of any type of existence can only be explained by reference to its implication in creative activity.” I hear Plato confirming: “Certainly, a particular *ousia* is its particular *dunamis*.” Whitehead goes on to say that the creative activity involves essentially “three factors: namely, data, process with its form relevant to these data, and issue into datum for further process – data, process, issue.” Now this sounds good and true while Whitehead is saying it, but once said, these words are just that, words, abstractions. Whitehead surely knows that, but in his keenness to work out distinctions, to articulate formulations, he seems sometimes to forget, or to wish he could forget, that we can never reach a final, definitive formulation. We must never forget that all our truths are half-truths that our reason must



constantly show to be false if they are not to enslave us. Whitehead realizes that it is fallacious “to imply that process can be analysed into compositions of final realities, themselves devoid of process” (p.96), but this is what any complete metaphysical system or complete cosmology implies. The philosophy of process, to remain true to itself, cannot dream of completion or finality. I am not here censuring Whitehead, for he himself repeatedly affirms this, but in our childlike delight in our new toys we all need to be constantly reminded of it.

Both Plato and Kant said that ‘ $5+7=12$ ’ is not an analytical statement. The form 12 is found neither in the 5, nor in the 7, nor in the conjunction of these two forms: it is an original form engendered in the mind and by the mind. I believe both Plato and Kant would agree to this explication. Whitehead represents the result of an arithmetical sum as the issue of a process. He says that “even the statement ‘six equals six’ need not be construed as a mere tautology” (p.93). He explains this in terms of the philosophy of process. We could also say that ‘six equals six’ may be taken to mean that any two groups of six share a common form, and we may say that this is true as far as it goes, but if it is taken to say that any two groups of six are identical, then it is definitely false. So even the most innocent-looking tautology may lie tame and harmless, like a sleeping dog, so long as it is left to itself, but when stirred will be seen to hide a nature neither tame nor harmless.

Whitehead’s great fault was his failure to draw the line between science and philosophy. In Lecture Seven of *Modes of Thought* he says: “In the essence of a material body—in its mass, motion, and shape—there is no reason for the law of gravitation. ... there was no reason in the Newtonian concepts of mass and motion why material bodies should be connected by any stress between them” (p.134). A little further on he says that Newton “thus illustrated a great philosophic truth, that a dead nature can give no reasons. All ultimate reasons are in terms of aim at value. A dead nature aims at nothing” (p.135). These lines sum up Socrates’ argument for the separation of science and philosophy (*Phaedo*, 95-101) without arriving at the conclusion Socrates

arrived at. It is such a pity that Whitehead persistently and obstinately remained ante-Kantian (and in mood anti-Kant). When he continues the lines I quoted by saying: "It is the essence of life that it exists for its own sake, as the intrinsic reaping of value," I would say this is good philosophy, great mysticism, beautiful poetry, but very bad science. But I have dealt with the necessity of separating science and philosophy so often and so amply in all my writings that I need not say anything further on the subject at this point.

Whitehead seeks to find the meaning of life. The meaning of life cannot be found by science. Indeed, the meaning of life cannot be found by anyone, because the meaning of life is not an objective thing out there to be found by searching. The meaning of life is, for you, what you make it. It is one thing for the Buddha; it is another thing for Epicurus; it is yet another thing for a Hitler. A human being creates her or his specific world; her or his specific mode of life; her or his character. That follows from one's personal philosophy. It makes sense to speak of one's personal philosophy. But it makes no sense to speak of one's personal science.

Whitehead rejects Descartes's dualism. In this I am entirely with him. But rejecting the Cartesian split of subject and object should not lead us to disregard the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible nor the distinction between the mode of looking within and the mode of looking without. Whitehead was right in emphasizing the unity of a living being or a living person but he erred in failing to emphasize the inwardness of our inner reality. To me our inner reality is our whole meaning and our whole worth. This need not, and should not, lead to the division of the world into 'mere' appearance and reality. The 'appearance' is all the actuality there is. The spiritual can only have its reality actualized in the transient, evanescent existent. Plato, the Buddha, Christian saints and mystics, all erred in over-emphasizing the 'unreality' of the body and the outer world. But not Wordsworth or Shelley. Nor did Kant make of the phenomenal 'mere' appearance; he found the real in 'the moral sense within' but was also awed by 'the starry heavens above.'

In “Immortality” (*Essays in Science and Philosophy*, p. 73) Whitehead says: “There is not a sentence which adequately states its own meaning. There is always a background of presupposition which defies analysis by reason of its infinitude.” A little further on he again affirms that “there is not a sentence, or a word, with a meaning which is independent of the circumstances under which it is uttered. ... My point is that we cannot rely upon any adequate explicit analysis.” Whitehead expressed this thought repeatedly in various wordings throughout his philosophical writings. In “Mathematics and the Good” he warns against the simple-minded use of Logic. “All propositions are erroneous unless they are construed in reference to a background which we experience without any conscious analysis” (pp.85-6). This is what most analytical philosophers have failed to absorb.

## GOD

**T**he term God in Whitehead’s usage changes its sense in different contexts. In *Science and the Modern World* God was the Principle of Concretion (p.203), a metaphysical principle among other metaphysical principles, an element in Whitehead’s cosmology, an element in the objective universe. He does not even have the independence of the demiurge, the Maker-God of the *Timaeus*. The last paragraph of the chapter on “God” (chapter XI) reads:

“Among medieval and modern philosophers, anxious to establish the religious significance of God, an unfortunate habit has prevailed of paying to Him metaphysical compliments. He has been conceived as the foundation of the metaphysical situation with its ultimate activity. If this conception be adhered to, there can be no alternative except to discern in Him the origin of all evil as well as of all good. He is then the supreme author of the play, and to Him must therefore be ascribed its shortcomings as well as its success. If He be conceived as the supreme ground

of limitation, it stands in His very nature to divide the Good from the Evil, and to establish Reason ‘within her dominions supreme.’”

This evades the ultimate metaphysical question about the nature and origin of ultimate Reality. This is a question that no cosmology and, in my opinion, no philosophy can answer. We know nothing and can know nothing about a God outside the world. In the world we find only the meanings we put into the world. Apart from that we encounter bare, stale, dumb presentations. There is only one place where we can find God, and that is within ourselves.

God as the Principle of Concretion (limitation) is in the tradition of the Holy Grail quest of the philosophers for an ultimate law of becoming. To my mind we can never find rest from this endless vain travail until we recognize Creativity as an original dimension of Reality. To my mind the creativity has to be intelligent creativity, or as I prefer to put it, Reality is nothing but Creative Intelligence.

Whitehead does speak of “the creativity whereby the actual world has the character of temporal passage to novelty.” I would accept this as a definition of my Creative Eternity. But Whitehead does not give this sense prominence in his metaphysics where God is mainly something objective. Creativity for Whitehead is basically equivalent to potentiality, whereas for me creativity is the Act which is the ultimate reality, the fulness of reality.

In *Religion in the Making* we have a different approach. At the end of Lecture III Whitehead finds that God is “the completed ideal harmony” that is the ground for “the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, the peace of life, and the mastery of evil” and that the religious insight is the grasp of this truth (pp.119-20). I will not spoil this beautiful passage by any comment; anyhow, this is hardly the God of Whitehead’s theoretical cosmology.

In the final two sections of the final Lecture Whitehead departs from the inward-looking approach and plunges into the doctrine of “the nature of God” in respect to which “the great cleavages of thought arise” (p.150). Indeed in these closing dozen pages he presents a positive Theology, featuring God as “the one systematic, complete fact, which is the antecedent ground conditioning every creative act” (p.154). What Whitehead says there can be inspiring as an imaginative vision; but presented as ‘truth’ it shares the fault of all dogmatisms. Besides, I cannot see it as an integral part of Whitehead’s ‘speculative philosophy’ For myself, I hold that I know nothing of the outer world and therefore know nothing of a God out there.

In *Process and Reality* Whitehead says that God “is unmoved by love for this particular, or that particular” (p.105). In this Whitehead agrees with Spinoza. I do not think we are justified in speaking of the nature of God. Whitehead himself elsewhere is concerned to free God of responsibility for evil. For myself I am content to say that all of that is beyond our ken. What I affirm is that I can only conceive of ultimate reality as intelligent and good: that is a judgment about my understanding and not about ultimate reality.

At the close of Chapter IX of Part II of *Process and Reality* Whitehead writes: “The concept of God is certainly one essential element in religious feeling. But the converse is not true; the concept of religious feeling is not an essential element in the concept of God’s function in the universe. In this respect religious literature has been sadly misleading to philosophic theory, partly by attraction and partly by repulsion” (p.207). I cannot say I understand what Whitehead is saying here. I only quote it as evidence that the concept of God for Whitehead remains ambiguous and indefinite.

When Whitehead speaks of “the nature of God” I feel this must be God in Spinoza’s sense. Indeed Whitehead speaks of the function of God in a certain sense as “analogous to the remorseless working of things in Greek and in Buddhist thought.” He continues: “The initial aim is the best for that *impasse*. But if

the best is bad, then the ruthlessness of God can be personified as Atè, the goddess of mischief. The chaff is burnt” (p.244). I refer this to the essential evanescence of the existent and say that this is tragic but not evil. But regarding evil I always speak with diffidence. I know evil in human beings as the bitter fruit of ignorance (*amathia* as meant by Socrates). Since I maintain that we know nothing of the objective world beyond its phenomenal presentations, I find it strictly meaningless to speak of good or evil in the world. Even when I affirm that to me ultimate Reality must be intelligent and good, I do not assert that that is true of the world but only that that is the only way I can find reality intelligible.

In a certain context Whitehead defines God as “that actuality in the world, in virtue of which there is physical law” (p.283). This is Spinoza’s *natura naturata* apparently separated from *natura naturans*, in other words, God here is the objective world as the sum total of all actuality.

Whitehead’s discussion of God in the final chapter of *Process and Reality*, “God and the World,” is disappointing and could not fail to be disappointing. At one point in Section II Whitehead’s aim seems to be the “elucidation of somewhat exceptional elements in our conscious experience – those elements which may roughly be classed together as religious and moral intuitions” (p.343). This is the right philosophical approach to the problem, and that is what Whitehead does in *Religion in the Making*. But only a few lines further on we read that God

“... as primordial, so far is he from ‘eminent reality,’ that in this abstraction he is ‘deficiently actual’ – and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fulness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms.”

If we conceive of God as ‘primordial actuality,’ then that is all we may expect. I don’t think that Whitehead’s distinction between God’s ‘primordial nature’ and his ‘consequent nature’

and his further articulations based on this distinction do anything to improve the total picture.

In the closing sections of the final chapter Whitehead gives voice to the experience every mystic seeks to express. Whitehead gives profound expression to that experience, but I can't see the mysticism comfortably lodged in the cosmology.

God as a philosophical concept has no part in *Adventures of Ideas*, where Whitehead sees the Good as "an ultimate qualification not to be analysed in terms of any things more final than itself" (p.190). This is what I mean in saying that goodness is an ultimate dimension of Reality. I have repeatedly affirmed that I can only conceive Reality as finally intelligent and good.

In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead says: "The notion of a supreme being must apply to an actuality in process of composition, an actuality not confined to the data of any special epoch in the historic field" (pp.93-4). Further on we read that deity "is that factor in the universe whereby there is importance, value, and ideal beyond the actual" (p.102). This is as distinct from the God of *Science and the Modern World* as from the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible.

Whitehead's conception of God remains ambiguous to the end. In his 1941 lecture on "Immortality" (*Essays in Science and Philosophy*, 1948, pp.60-74) he says: "The World of Value exhibits the essential unification of the Universe. Thus while it exhibits the immortal side of the many persons, it also involves the unification of personality. This is the concept of God." Then follows something given between square brackets, so it may have been a later addition. It reads: "But it is not the God of the learned tradition of Christian Theology, nor is it the diffused God of the Hindu Buddhistic tradition. The concept lies somewhere between the two."

In the essay "Process and Reality" Whitehead says: "... I think the universe has a side which is mental and permanent. This side is that prime conceptual drive which I call the primordial nature of

God” (ib., p.89). This to me sounds very Platonic, though it is what I find wrong in Plato. But a little further on Whitehead says: “The notion of the one perfection of order, which is (I believe) Plato’s doctrine, must go the way of the one possible geometry. The universe is more various, more Hegelian” (ib., p.90). Never think you have caught a philosopher! An original philosopher always intends what his words fail to convey!

I find Whitehead’s conception of God in the framework of his cosmology distinctly different from his conception of God in the area of religious experience. It is confusing to use the same term for two concepts that, to me at any rate, are not intelligibly related.

## WHITEHEAD ON DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

In “Free Will as Creativity” (included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009) I amplified on the answer I had given briefly in *Let Us Philosophize* to the riddle of determinism and free will. I have repeatedly asserted that a philosophical problem is not amenable to a final solution. But the ‘determinism versus free will’ riddle is not a genuine philosophical problem; it is a pseudo-problem, a muddle of confusions and misconceptions; once the tangles are untangled the pseudo-problem evaporates. When I wrote that essay I did not have in mind Whitehead’s treatment of the problem.

As I see it, what Whitehead terms his ‘theory of *organic mechanism*’ is a version of Spinoza’s doctrine of freedom as autonomy. Spinoza found room for relative autonomy within his strictly deterministic metaphysics. But having accepted the Cartesian rationalistic determinism, that was as far as he could go. Only a doctrine of creativity could help him break loose from that stranglehold. Whitehead repeatedly alludes to creativity as an ultimate feature of reality. But I somehow feel that something inhibited Whitehead from making full use of that notion. I seem to detect in him some uncertainty, some wavering. In what



follows I try to reach a clear view of Whitehead's position on the question.

In Chapter V of *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead touches on the problem of determinism and free will. The chapter is devoted to the Romantic reaction to the materialistic mechanism of the eighteenth century. "Wordsworth in his whole being expresses a conscious reaction against the mentality of the eighteenth century" (p.95). Whitehead characterizes Wordsworth's reaction as "a moral revulsion." Tennyson is appalled by the problem of mechanism. Whitehead finds this echoed in the *In Memoriam* line,

"The stars," she whispers, "blindly run."

Whitehead sets out the problem thus: "Each molecule blindly runs. The human body is a collection of molecules. Therefore, the human body blindly runs, and therefore there can be no individual responsibility for the actions of the body. If you once accept that the molecule is definitely determined to be what it is, independently of any determination by reason of the total organism of the body, and if you further admit that the blind run is settled by the general mechanical laws, there can be no escape from this conclusion" (p.96).

Nevertheless there were attempts to wriggle out of the difficulty by assuming that the mind "can supply for itself ... experiences other than those provided for it by the body" (p.96). John Stuart Mill's determinism exemplifies this attitude. In Mill's doctrine "volitions are determined by motives, and motives are expressible in terms of antecedent conditions including states of mind as well as states of the body" (p.97). But this doctrine, Whitehead affirms, "affords no escape from the dilemma presented by a thoroughgoing mechanism. ... Either the bodily molecules blindly run, or they do not. If they do blindly run, the mental states are irrelevant in discussing the bodily actions" (p.97).

Whitehead finds the answer in his philosophy of organism. He sums up his position in a paragraph which I have to quote in full:

“The doctrine which I am maintaining is that the whole concept of materialism only applies to very abstract entities, the products of logical discernment. The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the *whole* influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it. In the case of an animal, the mental states enter into the plan of the total organism and thus modify the plans of the successive subordinate organisms until the ultimate smallest organisms, such as electrons, are reached. Thus an electron within a living body is different from an electron outside it, by reason of the plan of the body. The electron blindly runs within or without the body; but it runs within the body in accordance with its character within the body; that is to say, in accordance with the general plan of the body, and this plan includes the mental state. But the principle of modification is perfectly general throughout nature, and represents no property peculiar to living bodies. In subsequent chapters it will be explained that this doctrine involves the abandonment of the traditional scientific mechanism, and the substitution of an alternative doctrine of organism” (p.98).

In *Process and Reality* Whitehead says, “The complexity of nature is inexhaustible” (p.106). Presumably we have to take the word ‘inexhaustible’ here literally, and to take it literally amounts to a refutation of determinism. No omniscient god can comprehend the inexhaustible complexity of nature in a formula, a law, or a theoretical scheme. Further on: “Thus an originality in the temporal world is conditioned, but not determined, by an initial subjective aim supplied by the ground of all order and of all originality” (p.108). Once again we are told that “... ‘decided’ conditions are never such as to banish freedom. They only qualify it. There is always a contingency left open for immediate decision” (p.284).

From *Adventures of Ideas* I pluck the following phrases which have a bearing on the problem and which, as it seems to me, reveal a residual wavering in Whitehead's position: "The ideals cherished in the souls of men enter into the character of their actions" (p.46). "Men are driven by their thoughts as well as by the molecules in their bodies, by intelligence and by senseless forces. The physical conditions are merely the background which partially controls the flux of modes and of moods" (p.51). "Our consciousness does not initiate our modes of functionings" (p.51). "We do not initiate thought by an effort of self-consciousness" (p.51). "Thus the autonomy of thought is strictly limited, often negligible, generally beyond the threshold of consciousness" (p.51). In Section III of Chapter IV Whitehead uses the phrases "flashes of free thought" and "flashes of freedom" synonymously. "... spontaneity is of the essence of soul" (p.55). At this point I permit myself to interpose a remark: We must not confuse the psychological problem and the philosophical problem. The concept of the will as a faculty is misleading and in any case it pertains to the field of psychology. What is important for philosophy is the value and reality of our moral spontaneity, of our creativity.

Then there comes a paragraph which I quote in full:

"There is a freedom lying beyond circumstance, derived from the direct intuition that life can be grounded upon its absorption in what is changeless amid change. This is the freedom at which Plato was groping, the freedom which Stoics and Christians obtained as the gift of Hellenism. It is the freedom of that virtue directly derived from the source of all harmony. For it is conditioned only by its adequacy of understanding. And understanding has this quality that, however it be led up to, it issues in the soul freely conforming its nature to the supremacy of insight. It is the reconciliation of freedom with the compulsion of the truth. In this sense the captive can be free, taking as his own the supreme insight, the indwelling persuasion towards the harmony which is the height of existence" (p.71).

Again we have: “The doctrine of the Uniformity of Nature is to be ranked with the contrasted doctrine of magic and miracle, as an expression of partial truth, unguarded and unco-ordinated with the immensities of the Universe” (p.81). But still I feel that in all of this Whitehead does not go beyond the freedom of the Stoics, who were metaphysically determinists, nor beyond Spinoza’s autonomy which was consistent with his Cartesian determinism.

When we move from the sphere of personal action to the sphere of history, again I find the same ambiguity in Whitehead’s position:

“By the phrase Historical Foresight, I mean something quite different from the accurate exercise of Scientific Induction. Science is concerned with generalities. The generalities apply, but they do not determine the course of history apart from some anchorage of fact. There might have been many alternative courses of history conditioned by the same laws. Perhaps, if we knew enough of the laws, then we should understand that the development of the future from the past is completely determined by the details of the past and by these scientific laws which condition all generation. Unfortunately our knowledge of scientific laws is woefully defective, and our knowledge of the relevant facts of the present and the past is scanty in the extreme. Thus as the result of all our science, we are ignorant of that remote epoch when there will be a second collision between the sun and a passing star, we are ignorant of the future of life on the earth, we are ignorant of the future of mankind, we are ignorant of the course of history a year hence, we are ignorant of most of the domestic details of our lives to-morrow, we are even ignorant of the term that has been set to our own existence” (pp.88-9).

Following the above he writes: “Also the basis of our defect in foresight is our scant knowledge of the relevant detailed facts in past and present which are required for the application of the scientific laws” (p.89). Further on Whitehead writes: “Science

deals with large average effects, important within certain modes of observation. But in the history of thought no scientific conclusion has ever survived unmodified by radical increase in our subtleties of relevant knowledge” (p.90). But this could still be read as relegating the uncertainty to human weakness rather than to the fundamental uncertainty in the processes of nature. So Whitehead’s position on freedom and determinism seems to be decidedly ambivalent: I would say schizophrenic if that were not too irreverent. In his scientific character he would endorse Laplace without reservation. Although he says, “Probably a neat doctrine of foresight is impossible,” he seems to see that as an inescapable defect in our capacity, not as a logical or metaphysical impossibility. But then the very spirit of the philosophy of organism demands autonomy and spontaneity and the poet in Whitehead often gives clarion voice to that. When speaking of “Historical Foresight” Whitehead finds himself precariously balanced between these two positions that are truly antithetical. Even when in Section VII of Chapter XII we seem to have the clearest rejection of determinis—: “The causal independence of contemporary occasions is the ground for the freedom within the Universe” (p.193)—there is still room for asking how this goes with the rest of Whitehead’s epistemology.

Whitehead somewhere refers to “the factor of compulsive determinism in the Universe” (id., p.243). I am not sure what to understand by this or how to fit it into Whitehead’s system. A little further on we have the assertion that “the future of the Universe, though conditioned by the immanence of its past, awaits for its complete determination the spontaneity of the novel individual occasions as in their season they come into being” (p.244), which can be seen to agree with: “Spontaneity, originality of decision, belongs to the essence of each actual occasion” (p.247). Nevertheless a lurking ambivalence in Whitehead’s position seems to have stood in the way of his fully and unreservedly acknowledging that creativity and spontaneity are of the essence of reality.

In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead seems to be more decided. He says: “In current literature we find the same authors denying

infractions of natural order, and denying any reason for such denial, and denying any justification for a philosophical search for reasons justifying their own denials” (p.88). This seems to rule out any wavering on the part of Whitehead on the question of determinism; he seems decidedly to deny determinism. So I may have been mistaken when I thought earlier that Whitehead remained undecided on the question. Perhaps it was a matter of emphasis and expression. It may be that in his earlier philosophical works he was still voicing the conventional position of mathematicians and physicists, but gradually came to see that his philosophy of process required that he emphasize creativity and deny determinism explicitly. Lecture Five in *Modes of Thought* closes with these words: “It is the religious impulse in the world which transforms the dead facts of science into the living drama of history. For this reason science can never foretell the perpetual novelty of history” (p.104).

In “Free Will as Creativity” I maintain that to resolve the riddle of determinism versus freedom we have (1) clearly to separate the problem of choice from the problem of free will; (2) to realize that all scientific laws are approximations and do not imply absolute determinism; (3) to acknowledge creativity as an original principle, an original dimension, of ultimate Reality. As I see it, Whitehead’s position is defective on (1), wavering on (2), and lacks emphasis on (3).

## CONCLUDING (MOSTLY IDIOTIC) REMARKS

“Philosophy,” says Whitehead, “is not one among the sciences with its own little scheme of abstractions which it works away at perfecting and improving. It is the survey of sciences, with the special objects of their harmony and their completion. It brings to this task, not only the evidence of the separate sciences, but also its own appeal to concrete experience. It confronts the sciences with concrete fact” (*Science and the Modern World*, p.106). This is a conception of

philosophy different from mine. Let us not say that our two views are opposed; they are parallel. I wish we could have different names to distinguish the two kinds. But Whitehead not only calls his version philosophy but also calls it metaphysics and again cosmology. I have sometimes used the designation 'philosophy proper' for what we may otherwise call metaphysics (begging Whitehead to cede the term to us).

I would say that a philosopher is only wrong when he declares other philosophers to be wrong. A genuine philosopher who thinks for herself or himself draws a picture of the world as she or he sees it from a certain perspective, articulated in the special language of a particular universe of discourse. This cannot be wrong: it can be flimsy, shallow, narrow, or relatively rich and deep and broad, but not wrong and not, correctly speaking, right. Philosophers will do well to understand this.

For this reason I make a radical distinction between facts (actualities, existents) and realities (Plato's *ousia*, *alêtheia*, *to ontôs on*). Philosophy has nothing to do with the former; science has nothing to do with the latter. I am not quite happy with my choice of terms. I wish I could find a less confusing terminology, a terminology less open to misunderstanding. I could with justice borrow Whitehead's statement: "We have suffered much from critics who consider it sufficient to criticise our procedure on the slender basis of a knowledge of the dictionary meanings of such terms" (p.171), replacing Whitehead's 'We' and 'our' with 'I' and 'my.' But I insist on the necessity of this distinction. Without it philosophy will continue to seem to be vain and science will continue to wage quixotic battles against illusory windmills.

Whitehead understands Ontology as "the determination of the nature of what truly exists; in other words, Metaphysics." He finds the exclusion of metaphysical inquiry from science a pity. He also says that while we can agree about science after due debate, "in respect to metaphysics debate has hitherto accentuated disagreement" ("The Anatomy of Some Scientific Ideas," *The Aims of Education*, p.180). I think this epitomizes what is wrong with the common conception of the nature of

metaphysical thinking. Scientific debate can end in agreement because it is about things that are ‘out there,’ are public, are amenable to objective examination. That there should be any metaphysical debate at all is sheer folly. A metaphysical statement is about something unique, something that is only there for the thinker as she or he thinks of it. It is not about a fact open to inspection by all; it gives expression to an original idea that is only there for its originator and that becomes a different thing for every mind that receives it and chooses to work on it.

“The results of science,” Whitehead tells us, “are never quite true” (“Space, Time, and Relativity,” *The Aims of Education*, p.233). It is easy to pass over this statement without sensing its basic implications. I give these as follows: The laws of science are never and can never be perfectly accurate, and that for a very good reason: there is no absolute regularity in nature. Nature is good-natured enough never to give us astounding surprises. Our planet will not tomorrow go round the sun at an appreciably faster or at an appreciably slower rate than it does today, but it will never go at exactly the same rate, if only because the mass of the sun is always changing. Nobody can ever prove, either empirically or logically, the truth or falsity of my contention that nature knows no absolute regularity, and I assure you that I am not claiming for my statement any scientific validity or scientific value. I offer my statement as an element in a philosophical vision. It has nothing to do with the actual world. (I am not sure Whitehead would accept my amplification of his statement.)

In “The Organisation of Thought” (*The Aims of Education*) there is a paragraph which clearly defines where I part company with Whitehead. I have to quote this paragraph in full:

“Ideal experiences are closely connected with our imaginative reproduction of the actual experiences of other people, and also with our almost inevitable conception of ourselves as receiving our impressions from an external complex reality beyond ourselves. It may be that an adequate analysis of every source and every type of experience yields demonstrative proof of such a reality



and of its nature. Indeed, it is hardly to be doubted that this is the case. The precise elucidation of this question is the problem of metaphysics. One of the points which I am urging in this address is, that the basis of science does not depend on the assumption of any of the conclusions of metaphysics; but that both science and metaphysics start from the same given groundwork of immediate experience, and in the main proceed in opposite directions on their diverse tasks” (pp.160-1).

Let us take the following statement, a scientific statement with unimpeachable scientific credentials: “Light consists of waves of vibrations in the electro-magnetic field.” I, a confessed ignoramus, will say that this is sheer nonsense. Let us look at it. Light (a thing which is a high mystery, not only to me but also to the greatest of scientists) consists of waves (which are not things but a form of movement) of vibrations (which are again not things but a form of motion) in the electro-magnetic field (which once again is not a thing nor a place but simply the ‘where’ where the waves of vibrations take place). Let us translate: “Light is a motion of motion where that motion of motion moves.” I am not making fun. I know that that scientific statement is of the highest importance and that it is thanks to it and its likes that I am now writing this on my laptop and can flash what I am writing in a moment to a friend on the other side of the globe. What I want to say, what I have been saying in book after book, is that science, or rather scientists, create fictions that enable us to manipulate the powers of nature but do not and can not give us understanding of nature. Both scientists and philosophers have found it very hard to acknowledge this fact.

I think Whitehead wronged himself by binding his ‘speculative philosophy’ too closely with scientific theory. Whitehead regrets the partial separation of philosophy and science in modern thought. I regret that the separation has been only partial.

In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead says that Newton “held the most simple-minded version of the Lucretian doctrine of the

Void, the most simple-minded version of the Lucretian doctrine of material atoms, and the most simple-minded version of the Law imposed by Divine decree. ... His cosmology is very easy to understand and very hard to believe. Pragmatically it experienced a supreme justification for two centuries" (p.129). Indeed, that is all that should be required of any scientific theory; to ask for more is to confuse the functions of science and philosophy. And in fairness to Newton we must note that he did not ask anybody to "believe" his cosmology. He asked people to work on it. A little further on Whitehead says that Lucretius and Newton "implicitly ask the question, What does the world of atoms look like to an intellect surveying it? What would such an intellect say about the spectacle of an atomic Universe?" (p.130). In the following paragraph Whitehead writes: "But Leibniz answered another question. He explained what it must be like to be an atom. Lucretius tells us what an atom looks like to others, and Leibniz tells us how an atom is feeling about itself." Of course, Leibniz' account is of little value "pragmatically" but it gives us understanding; it gives us a myth that is intelligible and that sheds intelligibility on the dumb world. That is philosophy. Whitehead half-knows this, but his interest in constructing a cosmology that has objective validity does not permit him to confess it openly. What I am saying here does not detract from my appreciation of what Whitehead says of the imperfections of Leibniz' theory.

'Disclosure' is a favorite word with Whitehead. Disclosure implies uncovering something that is out there for us to uncover. I have repeatedly criticized this implication. But it is partly true. All knowledge refers to something outside us. Even knowledge of ourselves, even reflective thought on our own thought, in a sense relates to what is other than the reflecting subject. The point of my criticism is that even then the form that gives understanding, that confers on the thing its 'disclosed' meaning, is in every case a creation of the mind. Plato was right; Kant was right: we find in nature only what we put into nature. But even Plato admitted that the raw matter of knowledge is provided by our senses.

Whitehead speaks of two kinds of abstraction. In the first kind the abstraction is “involved in the creation of any actuality, with its union of finitude with infinity.” I suppose this is what Plato saw as the actualization of the particular by participation in the Form. The second kind is that which we commonly refer to by ‘abstraction.’ It is “abstraction whereby finite constituents of the actual thing are abstracted from that thing. This procedure is necessary for finite thought, though it weakens the sense of reality. It is the basis of science.” This is the abstraction Whitehead campaigned against in his doctrine of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. Whitehead continues: “The task of philosophy is to reverse this process and thus to exhibit the fusion of analysis with actuality.” This is what Whitehead seeks to do in his cosmology. Whitehead concludes: “It follows that Philosophy is not a science.” (*Essays in Science and Philosophy*, “Mathematics and the Good,” p.86.) I willingly endorse this last sentence, though what I mean by it differs from what Whitehead means by it.

Whitehead decides to ignore nineteenth century idealism. This was to be expected. Whitehead states that “these idealistic schools have conspicuously failed to connect, in any organic fashion, the fact of nature with their idealist philosophies” (*Science and the Modern World*, pp.80-1). There could be no common ground, no common understanding, between Whitehead and these schools, and that, in my opinion, for the very good reason that they shared the same misconception of the nature of philosophy. Both parties wanted their philosophies to be true of the world. Both were building cosmologies. Whitehead was forming a scientific cosmology, based on scientific principles with sound empirical grounds. The Idealists built purely rational cosmologies. Both parties were simply inventing *muthoi*. Had they realized that, each could have appreciated and enjoyed the other’s *muthos* without having either to adopt it or to reject it.

The major sin of all British philosophy is the obsession with objects and objectivity. It is a kind of idolatry. Whitehead was not entirely free of that sin; he could not completely shed off that idolatry; that is why in the end instead of building up a

metaphysical system, such as Leibniz or Spinoza or Schopenhauer did, he built up a cosmology which is as intelligible and as inspiring but also as mythical as that of Plato's *Timaeus* – a cosmology which true philosophers will value but which no scientist, as scientist, will be satisfied with.

In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead says, “I hold that by a process of constructive abstraction we can arrive at abstractions which are the simply located bits of material, and at other abstractions which are the minds included in the scientific scheme” (p.74). This is the inveterate error of Empiricism. One way or another we reach an objective representation—logical, physical, neurological, whatever—of mind, and that is that: we have no further use for mind. In saying that Whitehead failed to escape the limitations of British Empiricism, I am not overlooking Whitehead's insightful criticism of the empiricism of Locke and Hume. When I speak of Whitehead remaining within the confines of British Empiricism I am speaking of a temper and an attitude that finds rest in the objective and that is hospitable to reductionism. That is why Whitehead stops short of fully assuming the Kantian position or adopting Plato's Idealism.

The other point where I claim my philosophy goes beyond Whitehead is the principle of creativity. For me all becoming is creative. While Whitehead asserts that all reality is process in organism, that is, in organic wholes, he yet sees the process as subject to, or at any rate as exemplifying, inexorable laws, I insist that all the laws, whether scientific or philosophical, are fictional abstractions, good for working out reasonable expectations, but are never determinative. I see all becoming as origination. There is no repetition in Nature. God never repeats himself. If it were not so we would have either utter chaos or the Nietzschean eternal cyclic recurrence. Whitehead repeatedly speaks of creativity, makes use of the notion of creativity, but does not give it full play. For me creativity is a first principle; indeed, for me, creativity is reality.

We think of things habitually as fixed, stable, permanent. To act on things, react to things, interact with things, we have to

think of them in this way. This is the habit of mind Bergson took it on himself to correct. We find it very hard to free ourselves of this way of seeing things. It is very hard for us to see that in the whole world there is not one single ‘thing’; the world itself is not a ‘thing’; there is no thingness in the world; there is only becoming; and the reality is not what becomes or what is becoming, but is the becoming: my reality is not in what I think or what I do; my reality is in the thinking; I am only real in the act of thinking.

I have been dismayed to find that the few of my friends who have read my books sympathetically found it hard to comprehend my concept of reality – reality transcending all existence and all forms, just as Plato thought of the Good as beyond both *ousia* and *epistêmê*. Let us take an analogy from science. Whitehead speaks of a time when scientists thought of mass as “the one final permanent quantity.” Energy was “construed as something subsidiary to matter.” (Quantity obviously had to be quantity of something, some stuff, and that, whatever it turns out to be is matter.) “Later on, we find the relations of mass and energy inverted; so that mass now becomes the name for a quantity of energy considered in relation to some of its dynamical effects. This train of thought leads to the notion of energy being fundamental, thus displacing matter from that position” (*Science and the Modern World*, pp.123-4). (For those who will scoff at me for apparently relying on nineteenth-century science, I have to explain that whatever advance or change science has made since Whitehead wrote affects neither Whitehead’s position nor mine. Neither Whitehead at this point nor I are doing science. Whitehead was taking the scientific concepts of a particular epoch as matter out of which to mould his philosophy of organism and process. I am taking Whitehead’s exposition as an analogy to clarify my concept of reality which I did not form in the first place with any reference to science but had arrived at it independently and developed it as an original version of Platonism. I could just as well use Hesiod’s theogony to illustrate my view. (In *Hypatia’s Lover* I made use of the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris.) Whitehead leads from this to the notion of

organism which to him is the final reality. Thus Whitehead finds organism as an objective reality, an objective concept, to rest in. But if we say that the final reality of the organism is energy and ask, energy of what?, energy in what?, we cannot find an answer without circularity. Thus I find that Whitehead's cosmology stops short of taking the final leap into the abyss of the mystery. If energy is final, we have to see it as just energy, not energy of anything, not energy in anything, not energy turned into some kind of stuff. We have to conceive the final reality purely and simply as the act, the doing, not what is acted or what is done. That is how I arrive at my notion of ultimate Reality as Creative Eternity, Creative Intelligence as simply intelligent creativity creating its own being, its own substantiality, its own forms; it itself transcending all existence, all being, all form. If we say that the final Reality is Mind, it must be mind not as an entity but as active intelligence or intelligent activity. I have been saying this in all my books and have tried to say it in diverse ways and to put special emphasis on it in my latest book, *Quest of Reality*.

Whitehead's profound and extensive scientific knowledge harmed him. He thought he could construct a comprehensive theory of nature. All he did in that direction was to replace the abstractions of physics with more sophisticated abstractions mainly inspired by biology. That could never form a metaphysics. What is valuable and lasting in Whitehead's philosophy are his general concepts of organism, process, and duration, and his insightful views of the religious experience and the meaning of life and human values. That is what makes his philosophy a great and original philosophy.

Cairo, October 17, 2013.

## RUSSELL'S DILEMMA

### I

**B**ertrand Russell (1872-1970) was one of the brightest and most energetic minds of the twentieth century. His personality was very rich in depth and variety. He was endowed with a very sensitive and generous nature and with a rare courage of conviction. Yet I maintain and will try to show in this essay that he was subject to a damaging limitation and constraint in his philosophical outlook (in a narrow sense of the term philosophical) imposed on him by his strict adherence to the British empiricist tradition. Perhaps this was partly temperamental since it seems that we are all born with either Aristotelean or Platonian minds, either of the number of Plato's Giants or of Plato's Gods (*Sophist*, 245e-246e).

In his *Autobiography* (1967-69) he wrote; "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a great ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair." Indeed his life did not run smoothly. In 1918 he was deprived of

his Cambridge lectureship and was imprisoned for openly advocating pacifism. In 1940 a US court disqualified him from holding a professorship at New York on account of "his moral views." He was awarded the OM in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. But he was imprisoned once again in 1961 for civil disobedience for championing the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In 1962 Russell succeeded in defusing the US-Soviet confrontation over Cuba that threatened the world with a nuclear war.

In 1914 Russell published *Our Knowledge of the External World*. The title defines the limits and scope of all that Russell continued to the end to see as all the knowledge possible for a human being. Despite his deep and active interest in all things human, in moral questions and in the social conditions of humankind, he never found, or apparently sought to find, a common ground for his theoretical philosophy on the one hand, and his morality and social philosophy on the other hand. These remained for him to the end in separate non-communicating compartments. This was inevitable since he rejected the possibility of any metaphysics and refused to acknowledge any knowledge other than the knowledge obtained from empirical sources. And though he had from his early youth or boyhood onwards strong mystic rumblings within him and an undying yearning for religious satisfaction, his unfaltering commitment to his empirical epistemology denied him the possibility of finding any rational ground for his mystic aspirations.

Consequently Russell had no moral philosophy. He had a personal morality but no ethics. His sound moral instincts, his native humaneness, his sane social philosophy could not find support in the atomism of his theoretical philosophy. A moral philosophy consistent with his basic theory would probably have had to be a Hobbesian morality. In spite of the width and depth of his humane sympathies and interests he could never unite human realities and analytical abstractions in one world. But I do not intend to go further into this in the present essay.



For Russell philosophy investigated all of nature, all the universe, but not the All. His radical pluralism meant that in his thought reality remained fragmented. The fundamentally atomic outlook of the empiricist approach could not see the one in the many – which was Plato’s touchstone for truly philosophic thinking.

I was once chided for describing Russell as an empiricist. Let me explain what I mean by that term. An empiricist, to my mind, is one who holds that, apart from pure logic and pure mathematics, all the knowledge possible to human beings comes ultimately and fundamentally from our perception of the outer world. This is what I refer to as the British empiricist tradition, a tradition descending from Bacon through Hobbes and Locke to Hume. I maintain that Russell remained true to that tradition throughout his entire career. His valuable work on mathematics, symbolic logic, and analysis was all concerned with the formal aspect of empirical knowledge, just as Aristotle’s logic dealt with the form of thinking, the content of which was supplied by physical, biological and other objective investigations,

All of the modern denigration of philosophy and in particular of metaphysics, from Hume’s “commit it to the flames,” to Ayer’s characterization of all metaphysical statements as nonsense, and Carnap’s rude abuse of all metaphysics, all of that comes from the failure or refusal of philosophers to heed Socrates’ clear-cut distinction between the objective investigation of things outside us, which gives us knowledge of (in Kant’s terminology) the phenomenal world, and the subjective exploration of the mind, which gives us understanding of ourselves and our own motives and aims and values. I have repeatedly in my writings commented on the important passage in the *Phaedo* (95e-102a) where Socrates introduces and elucidates this all-important distinction. I believe that the vital importance of this passage and the general oblivion to its crucial message justify my taking it up once more here.

Socrates says that, as we might expect, in his young years he was interested in the physical investigations initiated by the

Ionian thinkers, leading up to Anaxagoras's doctrine. But he soon realized that such investigations cannot yield answers to the kind of questions he was concerned with. He was convinced that the ideas, ideals, and values that govern our characteristically human life, are engendered in the mind and by the mind and are found nowhere but in the mind. The investigation of things outside us, on the one hand, and reflection on the ideas, ideals and values that constitute our humanity and determine the quality of life we live, on the other hand, are two radically distinct and separate kinds. To emphasize the distinction and obviate confusion I say that the one kind gives us knowledge, the domain of science, and the other understanding, the domain of philosophy. Socrates exemplifies the distinction in two ways. In the *Phaedo* passage we see him in prison awaiting execution of the death sentence passed on him, having resolutely refused his friends' attempts to arrange his escape. Now science would explain his posture there in his prison by describing the bones, sinews, joints, etc., that account for his posture there and then, but only his ideas of justice and honour can explain why he remains there rather than going away as his friends wanted him to do. These are two separate realms neither of which has anything to contribute to the other. The failure of philosophers to see this and their confounding of science and philosophy have had and continue to have damaging consequences for both science and philosophy.

The other exemplification that Socrates gives is equally important and, if anything, has met with even greater blindness on the part of philosophers. If we seek to explain the beauty, say, of a picture, we can give analyses of the play of light and shade, of the harmony of various colours, of motives and symbols and of suggestive formations: all of that is good as far as it goes, but it does not explain what we experience as beauty when we look at a beautiful object. Only our idea of Beauty gives the meaning of what we mean by saying that this or that thing is beautiful. As Socrates puts it, it is by Beauty that all" things beautiful are beautiful.

Our familiarity with our linguistic usages makes it hard for us to grasp the profound meaning in this. In the elenctic discourses,

Socrates begins by asking about what we mean by, say, temperance. We find that all of our attempts to explain temperance in other terms are unsatisfactory. The conversation ends in perplexity and puzzlement, *aporia*. Aristotle has misled us into thinking that Socrates' aim was to find definitions and Aristotle's error has blinded us to the true purpose of the Socratic elenchus. Socrates wanted his interlocutor to realize that he can only find meaning in the self-evidence of the idea in the mind. The idea does not represent a thing outside us; the idea is not an Aristotelean universal arrived at by abstraction; the idea is a creation of the mind that confers meaning on the dumb givennesses of our experience. Three stones are lying before me. For a creature innocent of the idea of number, that is just a visual configuration; only one who has acquired the idea of number sees that configuration as three stones. Kant, in his Copernican revolution, was re-discovering this Socratic insight, as when he said that the understanding, strictly speaking, legislates for nature, so that "without understanding there would not be any nature at all, or again when he said that in so far as human experience is concerned the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature.

## II

My first idea for this essay was to write a sort of running commentary on Russell's *My Philosophical Development* (1959). Russell appended to his book Alan Wood's unfinished study, *Russell's Philosophy: A Study of its Development*. Following Russell's own advice in his Prefatory Note, I decided to turn to Wood's study first. I eventually found that the remarks I jotted down while reading it cover the substance of what I had it in mind to say about Russell's philosophic position. I am therefore presenting this paper as a preliminary statement. to be followed perhaps by marginal notes on the two summaries Russell gave us of his philosophy: *Outline of Philosophy* (1927) and *My Philosophical Development* (1959).

Wood cites Whitehead as having once described Russell as “a Platonic dialogue in himself,” p.192. This is insightful, since Russell’s philosophy is a ceaseless exploration. But Russell’s empiricist outlook made him incapable of appreciating the Socratic insight behind the *aporia* of the Platonic dialogue. A Socratic dialogue is not, as Aristotle erroneously thought, a search for definitions, and the *aporia* to which it invariably leads is not a failure but is the deliberate end and purpose of the elenchus. Socrates, beside helping clear the confusions and entanglements and obscurities in his interlocutor’s ideas, wants his interlocutor to see that the meaning of an idea can never be found in anything outside the idea itself but can only be found in beholding the idea in its own self-evidence in the mind and that the only way to understanding is in turning the mind inwards, in understanding ourselves. This is a lesson Russell’s student Wittgenstein glimpsed at last but that Russell himself never grasped.

Despite Russell’s reputed early Platonism, I believe that his view of Plato’s Forms was the Aristotelean distorted representation of Plato’s doctrine. So Russell never understood Plato and likewise he never understood Kant whose transcendental system, in my opinion, is a timid and partial re-discovery of Plato’s position. I will be reverting to this in more detail below.

Wood quotes Russell as saying, “I wanted certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith,” p.192. Poor Russell! He could not rest in the Platonic conviction that there is no certainty anywhere for the human mind and that the highest wisdom for a human being is the confession of Socratic ignorance. Hence Plato insists in the *Republic* that dialectic must destroy all the presuppositions of reasoning. No determinate articulation of thought can claim finality or certainty. I see this clearly indicated in the early dialogues, in particular in the *Lysis*. In my opinion, Plato wrote the *Parmenides* to drive this lesson home. Accordingly Plato saw that the profoundest philosophical insights cannot be contained in any definite formulation of thought and can only be conveyed in metaphor and myth.

Thus trying to understand the world, while denying himself the first requisite for understanding the world was Russell's Holy Grail. The only way to understand the world is to have a vision of the Whole, the All, to create for oneself an understanding of the world. But that is metaphysics and Russell denied the very possibility of metaphysics. That philosophers "have believed that the world is a unity" is in Russell's view "rubbish." He rejected the whole tradition of philosophy from Thales through Parmenides and Plato to Spinoza and Bradley. "I think the universe is all spots and jumps, without unity, without continuity, without coherence ... Indeed there is little but prejudice and habit to be said for the view that there is a world at all (*The Scientific Outlook*, p.98m quoted by Wood, p.199). This is a total denial of the possibility of metaphysics.

Wood quotes a letter written by Russell to Constance Malleson in 1918 in which he says, "I *must* before I die, find *some* way to say the essential thing that is in me. that I have never said yet—a thing that is not love or hate or pity or scorn, but the very breath of life, fierce and fearful passionless force of non-human things ...," p.193 – words that could have come from Giordano Bruno. This reveals the dilemma of Russell's philosophic life. He was a born mystic wanting to find his inner reality but sought it in the wrong place, in the world outside him. His British empiricist tradition denied him release from that dilemma. He was a person of a rich spirituality whose philosophy denied the reality of spirituality. It seems that in his young years he took in good faith Plato's poetic dream of a celestial heaven of Forms as presented in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium*. Only Al Hallaj's exultant cry, "I am the Truth," could save him.

At one point Wood writes: "One might sum up his public career as a philosopher, as: From Kant to Kant," p.194. Russell demurs at this. He inserts a footnote stating that he "cannot subscribe to this formula." I will quote Russell's footnote in full and comment on it, but at this point I wish to remark that we will see later on that Wood was not unjustified in the statement Russell objects to.

Here is Russell's footnote rejecting Wood's statement:

"I cannot subscribe to this formula. My final views are less Kantian than Alan Wood supposes. I will mention two points. First, though the external world is probably not quite like the world of perception, it is connected with the world of perception by correlations, which are impossible in a philosophy which regards time and space as subjective. Second, the principles of non-deductive inference which I advocate are not put forward as certain or *a priori* but as scientific hypotheses.—B.R."

Russell's remarks clearly show how he failed to understand Kant. First, the correspondences between the external world (in whatever sense that is taken) and the world of perception, whether we are speaking of correspondence between scientific abstractions and perception or between different occurrences or levels of perception, are all part of the phenomenal sphere. Secondly, I am not sure that Kant would accept the statement that time and space are 'subjective.' What I mean to say is easier to grasp with reference to time. Time is not a reflection in consciousness of something outside us. There is no time outside us: there are only successive states as Hume would say or there is only process as Whitehead would say. Time is the form conferred by the mind to make sense of the succession or to give conceptual unity to the process. Thirdly, Russell says that the principles of his non-deductive inferences are not put forward as certain or *a priori* but are scientific hypotheses. Kant's transcendental philosophy has room for scientific hypotheses, but beside scientific hypotheses we have the 'certainties' of mathematics: what about  $5+7=12$ ? Is it an empirical statement or an *a priori* affirmation? My comments are directed towards showing Russell's failure to understand Kant but they do not so far belie Russell's denial of any affinity between Kant's position and his. Yet when we find him saying in *The Scientific Outlook*, p.101, "The external world may be an illusion, but if it exists, it consists of events, short, small and haphazard. Order, unity and continuity are human inventions, just as truly as catalogues and encyclopaedias" (quoted by Wood, pp.199-200), we cannot but

feel that Wood was justified. But this has to be taken together with his saying in the same book that “there is little but prejudice and habit to be said for the view that there is a world at all.”

Russell sought “impersonal objective truth,” which is a chimera or a contradiction in terms. There is no truth in the outside world. Truth is a creation of the mind. In the objective world there are only mute givennesses bereft of meaning until meaning is conferred upon them by the human mind as Russell himself seems to admit in the lines quoted above.

In a footnote (n. 4, p.194) Wood says that Russell “never made up his mind exactly what he meant by philosophy.” Although no philosopher can be blamed for failing to make up his mind on that question since (a) philosophy necessarily means something different to every philosopher, and (b) only a philosopher’s total work defines what philosophy means for that particular philosopher, yet in the case of Russell there was another reason why philosophy could never have a definite meaning, or any meaning, for him. For him there was no knowledge or truth other than what objective science saw as such. Philosophy could be nothing but aimless rambling. For Plato philosophy was a ceaseless rambling, but it was not aimless. It led to the revealing Socratic *aporia* that led back to the inner reality of the active, creative mind—to *phronêsis*, not *nous* but *noêsis*, not an entity but an act—as the ultimate reality, the only reality for us.

Wood repeatedly speaks of Russell seeking truth in religion. The word ‘truth’ here is confusing. Religion in the best sense—the religion of a Schleiermacher or a Whitehead—is a spiritual state. Truth relates to the objectively existent, what is outside us. The truth in religion or of religion is Plato’s *alêtheia*, which is not truth as understood by scientists. What Russell sought and yearned for is better expressed by what Russell himself called religious satisfaction. But Russell wanted to find in religion something to satisfy his scientific criteria, some impersonal, certain, objective truth; that was to seek the impossible. When Russell speaks of seeking to find religious satisfaction, that is the

agonized cry of a sensitive soul denied by its fundamental philosophy to find reality within itself.

Russell says, “I came to philosophy through mathematics, or rather through the wish to find some reason to believe in the truth of mathematics” (“Logical Atomism,” as quoted by Wood, p.195). Russell yearned for rest in faith, in belief, but his philosophy made him picture that to himself as a yearning for truth. Had he understood Plato or had he understood Kant he would have spared himself his endless quandary. Wittgenstein discovered there was no truth in mathematics. Whitehead stopped at a halfway house because he too could not free himself completely from his basic empiricist outlook.

Wood cites M. Weitz (p.195) as declaring that Russell’s primary interest had been the attempt to justify science. It is the same fruitless quest. You cannot both accept Hume’s undermining of the rationality and of the very possibility of science, indeed of all knowledge, and also seek to justify science. The only way out of Hume’s nihilism is through Kant’s transcendental theory of knowledge which is consistent with Plato’s doctrine of knowledge.

Wood sums up Russell’s career as a threefold failure:

“(a) He not only had to abandon religion, but objective ethical knowledge as well. (b) He was not fully satisfied with the system of *Principia Mathematica*, and Wittgenstein convinced him—or almost convinced him—that in any case mathematical knowledge was only tautological. (c) His defence of scientific knowledge in *Human Knowledge* was not in accordance with the kind of standards he had hoped to satisfy earlier” (p.195).

Wood follows this by saying, “All philosophers are failures.” I would say that that is so only if they mistakenly set out to (a) obtain objective knowledge, and/or (b) to reach demonstrable truth. Many of them make one or both of these mistakes but some of them nevertheless develop valuable philosophies by forgetting



about their initial quest. Russell could not forget and his failure was irremediable. He was too clear-headed about his objectives and too faithful to his empiricist heritage. He thus denied himself any possible way out.

Russell says: "Every truly philosophical problem is a problem of analysis; and in problems of analysis the best method is that which sets out from results and arrives at the premisses" (Philosophical Importance of Mathematical Logic, as quoted by Wood, p.195). It seems that later Analysts ran away with the first part of Russell's statement and completely overlooked the second part. Analysis as advocated by Russell is a useful method for working within an established system, but it cannot validate the established system or confer philosophical certainty on its conclusions.

Russell says, "The inferring of premisses from consequences is the essence of induction; thus this method in investigating the principles of mathematics is really an inductive method, and is substantially the same as the method of discovering general laws in any other sciences" (as quoted by Wood, p.196). In a closed system you can work upwards from consequences to premises or downwards from premises to consequences. But the first principles, not only in mathematics but all over are ultimately creative, or, in Kant's terminology, *a priori*.

Initially Russell hoped that, as Wood puts it (p.196) "by going far enough back, he could arrive at premisses that were absolutely certain." We may ask, certain in what sense? Ultimate principles cannot derive their certainty from an external source or ground. The only mode of certainty for ultimate principles is self-evidence, is to be satisfactory to reason. I have always maintained that the final criterion of rationality is intelligibility. That, for me, is the essence of the principle of sufficient reason. Yet Plato teaches us that no determinate formulation of thought can be free of contradiction and consequently dialectic has to destroy all the grounds of determinate thought. Accordingly, the dream of absolute certainty is a false dream. For reason there are only two modes of rest: the rest of stagnation, fossilization, and death, and

the mode of spontaneous creativity or creative spontaneity. In all my writings I have maintained that we attain our ultimate reality and ultimate satisfaction in creative intelligence or intelligent creativity. Nirvana is not a passive state but is the Act.

Wood says that Russell's work is "a classic example of what can be achieved by attempting the impossible" (p.196). Sadly, philosophers have been and still are engaged in attempting the impossible because they did not heed either Plato who had the full answer, or Kant, who timidly and hesitantly approached the answer.

Because Russell could not abandon his hopeless quest for impersonal truth and certainty he had to abort his best insights. Thus he says, "Philosophical argument, strictly speaking, consists mainly of an endeavour to cause the reader to perceive what has been perceived by the author. The argument, in short, is not of the nature of proof, but of exhortation" (quoted by Wood, p, 197, from *Principia Mathematica*: see Wood's footnote about Russell's limitation of the applicability of his statement). I find this completely in agreement with what I mean in holding that philosophy is oracular. But Russell is not only reserved about the applicability of his statement to branches of knowledge other than mathematics but fails to follow his insight to where it could lead.

Russell's dilemma arose from his insistence on finding impersonal, absolute, objective truth, from his refusal to acknowledge that all truth and all reality is a creation of the human mind.

In the final sentence of Wood's unfinished study he quotes Russell as having once said: "Logic and mathematics ... are the alphabet of the book of nature, not the book itself." This agrees with and justifies Wittgenstein's conclusion about the vacuity of symbolic logic. There is no meaning and no logic in the alphabet, likewise there is no meaning and no logic in Logic. The attempt of Logical Analysts to obtain knowledge by manipulating logical formulas is sheer folly.

Russell inflicted on himself a two-horned dilemma. On the theoretical plane he sought certainty in the objective world where, as Hume had assured us, no certainty could be found; and on the spiritual plane he sought religious satisfaction while denying the locus and fount of spirituality, our inner reality.

Cairo, February 19, 2014.



## METAPHYSICAL REALITY

**W**e all know what is meant by 'reality' in common usage. In common usage 'reality' is closely connected with the notion of 'truth,' and 'truth' is understood to be what can be verified and ascertained by examining the thing itself; a thing commonly accessible to sight or touch; a thing that can be measured or weighed; a thing that can be put in a test tube. In some languages the two notions are not distinguished by separate words. When I started translating my books into Arabic I had much trouble trying to elucidate this distinction.

The earliest Greek philosophers did not encounter this problem. Their investigations were *peri phuseôs*, about Nature, although 'nature' did not mean to them exactly what it means to us. And they were not primarily concerned with the verification or with the validity of their ideas about nature. They were developing imaginative visions that made sense of the appearances and the happenings surrounding them. Parmenides, who may justly be called the father of metaphysics, took for his subject, his starting point, '*esti*,' 'It is' or 'That which is.'

It was Plato who gave us an original concept of reality which, I maintain, we have not yet fully absorbed and for which he did not have a special word. He used the word *alêtheia* which

commonly means ‘truth’ but gave it a completely new meaning. He also used *ousia* and *to on* as synonyms for *alêtheia* in that special, original sense. And that is what I call Metaphysical Reality and that is what I have been trying to expound in all my writings and what I will try to depict in bare outline here.

Plato’s well-known Allegory of the Cave (in Book VII of the *Republic*) has perhaps contributed to give unfortunate emphasis to the view Plato repeatedly expresses as to the ‘unreality’ of the things we perceive through our bodily senses. It is commonly considered that Plato thought of the perceptible things we encounter in our daily life as illusory and as deceptive appearances. It is true that Plato uses language that apparently supports such an interpretation, but the words he used did not mean to Plato what they have come to mean for us. Plato was a Hellene and was a poet, and no Hellene and no poet can think of the ‘plane-tree by the Ilissus with the choir of the cicadas filling the surrounding air’ (*Phaedrus*) as deceptive appearance, nor can the man who wrote the *Charmides* and the *Symposium* be insensitive to the charm and force of bodily beauty. What Plato meant in his denigration of perceptible things had two dimensions or two levels. In the first place, as these things are constantly subject to change and as our senses themselves are never completely reliable, these things cannot be the source or the foundation of the truthful knowledge and understanding we desire. In the second place, all things of the world and all bodily things, are in and by themselves vanity of vanities. So if these things are ‘unreal’ in the double sense of failing to give us certain knowledge and failing to infuse our life with meaning and value, where do we find what is real as opposed to those things?

Again we find Plato answering this question on two levels. On the first level the answer rests on the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible. It is in the intelligible realm, in ideas and ideals born in the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind, that we find knowledge and understanding and find the ideals and values that constitute our characteristically human nature and that give meaning and value to human life. These things are real as opposed to the things of

the outer world. In this the Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth, Shelley, Emerson, Gandhi, Schweitzer are in complete accord with Plato. And in this, to my mind, Plato did not go beyond Socrates.

But Plato goes on to create for us a wholly original Reality. (I purposely say ‘create an original Reality’ and not ‘create an original concept of Reality.’) Plato speaks of the philosopher having a comprehensive vision of all time and all being. He speaks of seeing the one in the many and seeing the many in the one. He asserts that only he who has this synoptic vision is a philosopher. Plato is the first philosopher to form clearly and advance expressly the concept of the Whole in the sense of the integral and integrating all-embracing Reality. In the *Republic* he pictures this all-embracing, all-generating ultimate Reality as the Form of the Good that is at once beyond Knowledge and beyond Being, at once transcends Knowledge and Being. This is Metaphysical Reality, the concept of a Wholeness that makes us whole. In the Form of the Good Parmenides’s passive One becomes the living, creative Fount of all being and all understanding. And this is ultimate Reality, which is not a transcendent god or creator, nor any existent world nor anything objective. The vision of this Reality, which is confessedly the child of the human mind, which gives us insight into our own inner reality, makes us whole and makes us real, and we may reasonably say that our inner being is the only reality and all the reality we are aware of immediately and indubitably as opposed to all the fleeting, ephemeral, transient things outside us.

This ultimate Reality, Plato tells us, is strictly ineffable. It gives us wholeness and meaning as a principle, but we cannot confine it in any determinate formulation of thought. We can only give expression to it is myth, parable, and metaphor. And we must constantly undo our myths and metaphors and parables, for if we permit them to parade as final truths they turn into superstitions.

This is Metaphysical Reality. Philosophers give us visions of this Reality, insightful visions that infuse meaning and value into our life. But philosophers are in error when they think their

particular formulations representing their vision are definitive accounts of objective reality.

Here I have outlined what I mean by Metaphysical Reality but I would be an utter fool if I fancied for a moment that what I have said is adequate or sufficiently clear. Plato gave us the original concept and great thinkers have failed to grasp it and other great thinkers have fumbled on its outskirts. I have been trying to put it forward in book after book, but I find that even those who read my writings with sympathy and embrace certain aspects or details of my statements still seem to find what I regard as the foundation of my whole work difficult to grasp or they may even be totally oblivious of it.

Sixth-October City, Egypt,  
October 24, 2013.



## WHAT USE IS PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophy, as understood in the West, began some twenty-six centuries ago. From Thales in the sixth century BC to the present day scores of brilliant minds busied themselves with the problems of philosophy. Many of them left works that have stood the test of time, are still read and will for centuries to come continue to be read with admiration. But ask any number of professors of philosophy “What is the outcome of it all?” and you will find no agreement. Ask them “What is philosophy?” and you will find no agreement. Surely we have a problem here.

In the eighteenth century we had Hume’s ‘commit it to the flames’ dictum. In the twentieth century A. J. Ayer (1910-1989) equated metaphysics with nonsense. Rudolf Carnap (1891-1970) could be more brazenly abusive. What is practised in present-day universities by the name of philosophy, especially in the English-speaking world, may have interested Plato in one of his moods, but Socrates would have said: “I have no time for that. I am trying to follow the Delphic oracle, enjoining that I know myself, and that leaves me no time for anything else.”

I maintain that it is Socrates who has the answer to our problem. In the *Phaedo* Plato puts in the mouth of Socrates an autobiographical account that students of philosophy have failed

to appreciate. Socrates says that he has early given up investigations into natural things, not that he denied the importance or value of such investigations, but because he saw that such investigations were irrelevant to the questions with which he was concerned. He was interested in the ideals and values that constitute the worth of human being. He saw that here we have an area of investigation radically distinct from that other area of investigation concerned with natural things. He saw that the questions relating to either area were distinct, and so were also the methods of investigation proper to each. Neither of the two distinct areas and methods of investigation had any connection with, or any relevance to, the other.

Unfortunately this clear separation of science and philosophy was overlooked by subsequent philosophers. Philosophers confused their business with that of science on the one hand and of mathematics on the other hand. They thought they were required to, and could, obtain factual knowledge about the objective world, like scientists, or were required to, and could, reach demonstratively certain propositions, like mathematicians. These two illusions led many philosophers astray. They confidently gave supposedly factual accounts of natural things that subsequent scientific investigations showed to be false. They confidently advanced theoretical propositions, supporting them with plausible arguments that were readily opposed with other equally plausible arguments. Confidence in philosophy and philosophers was inevitably shaken.

Empirical science and pure mathematics alone were respectable and highly valued. Objective science gave us power over nature and laid the foundation for material progress. Mathematics, even though modern mathematicians questioned its foundations and expressed puzzlement at their own findings, in practice resulted in amazing technological achievements. But all of that left us bereft of wisdom. We are deluged with knowledge but are gasping for understanding.

We need to go back to Socrates. We need to look within ourselves. We need to disentangle our tangled values and ideals;

to clear our befogged notions; to shed light on our obscure aims. That is what Socrates spent all his life doing. That is the task of philosophy. That speaks out the necessity of philosophy for humanity.

We still have to deal with the second fatal illusion, that philosophy has to reach demonstratively certain propositions. Philosophical statements cannot claim finality, and must not seek finality. Finality is the death of reason and understanding. For the clarification of this vital philosophical insight we have to go to Plato. But within the scope of this short essay I cannot expand on this.

Cairo, October 7, 2013.



## THE INSUFFICIENCY OF SCIENCE

**J**ames Frazer (1854-1941), famed as the author of *The Golden Bough* (first edition 1890), advanced the theory that human thought progressed through three stages: magic, religion, and science. This is now commonly accepted as a truth beyond question. But it can be seen as a one-sided view. One could say with equal truth, or with more truth, that the movement of human thought from magic to religion to science was a retrogression away from life. In magic humans were united with nature; in religion they still had a strong bond with nature – at any rate in primitive religion before it was fossilized by institutionalization; in science they substituted the immediacy of living experience with a system of lifeless abstractions. This is what A. N. Whitehead branded as the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

We cannot of course reverse the process and go back to religion or to magic. It is philosophy that comes to the rescue. Philosophy finds in the symbolism of magic and in the myths of religion insight into the mystery of life and the mystery of being – a mystery that necessarily remains a mystery. The insight into the mystery is strictly ineffable and can only be expressed in metaphor, parable, and myth that confesses itself myth. That is philosophy as Plato understood it; and that is the point of Plato's insistence that dialectic must constantly destroy its own grounds.

To cut ourselves off the living fount of mystery and content ourselves with the bloodless abstractions of science is not only to impoverish our life but, more seriously, is to risk to lose sight of the true values and aim of life –witness the imbecility with which the mightiest and most scientifically and technologically advanced powers on Earth are driving the human race to certain disaster.

The calamity of the world is that we have too much knowledge and too little understanding.

Sixth-October City, Egypt,  
October 1, 2013.

## WHY I OPPOSE MATERIALISM

I oppose philosophical materialism on metaphysical grounds. Philosophical materialism also has a moral offshoot which I also oppose. But I do not intend to say much on moral materialism in this essay. (We all know of course that old-fashioned ‘materialism’ has no place in modern science, but the word is still the most convenient designation for the many forms of the outlook that holds that what can be objectively observed is the whole of what is real.)

Philosophically materialism is not bad metaphysics or poor metaphysics. It is a denial of metaphysics, a rejection or failure to form a conception of the All. In this sense it goes hand in hand with Bertrand Russell’s pluralism. I think that for a human being to be whole and sound within she or he needs to have a conception of the All, a conception that was embryonic in the *phusis* of the Milesian thinkers, became fully formed in Parmenides’s One, and attained maturity in Plato’s Form of the Good. To obviate a possible misunderstanding I hasten to say that I am not advocating a particular conception of the All as a dogma or creed, but this disclaimer cannot be properly understood or justified except within the framework of my view of the nature of philosophical thinking.

Primitive animists were not fools. They applied good empirical principles. They knew that all their own conscious movements were initiated and directed by a power within them. Their assumption that bees and trees and even planets are similarly motivated was not irrational and, in my opinion, it is not demonstrably false. When scientists from the sixteenth century onwards decided to ignore the power within and concentrate on what can be externally observed, measured, weighed, tested, that was a methodical approach that bore rich fruit. But when Descartes said that animals were automata he proved himself a fool. Both Francis Bacon and Newton knew that to exclude ‘the power within’ from scientific investigation is not to deny that power. Bacon affirmed that “all bodies whatsoever ... have perception.” Newton knew that he had found a method for calculating the movement of a bullet or a star but he plainly confessed that what made a thing move remained a mystery to him. Those who think that Newton’s theory or Einstein’s theory explains the motion of things simply confuse two distinct meanings of the word ‘explain’ or rather are completely ignorant of one of the two meanings. (See “Explaining Explanation” in *The Sphinx and the Phienix*, 2009.)

When Pierre Laplace (1749-1827) enunciated his classic formulation of the postulate of causal determinism the blindness of empirical scientists to the ‘power within’ became total. We were not far from the day when people boldly asserted that atoms blindly tumbling through aeons of time would produce all of the works of Shakespeare. (See “Free Will as Creativity” in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*.)

Plato in an apparently casual sentence in the *Phaedo* equated ‘being’ (*einai*) with ‘being acted on or acting’ (*paschein ê poiein*) (97c-d). This was not an inadvertent slip as modern scholars tend to think. In the *Sophist* Plato argues that even confining ourselves to what materialists think of as real, we ultimately find that that is nothing but power (*ouk allo ti plên dunamis*, 247e). Haven’t our modern physicists found that, in the final analysis, we know nothing of things but an equation that represents not a thing acting or a thing acted upon but merely the acting or the reception



of action? I am not a scientist and perhaps scientists do not put it that way, but I doggedly maintain that Stephen Hawking would not find my statement at fault. (See *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005, Ch. X, “The *Sophist*.”)

In *Hypatia’s Lover* (2006), under my fictional “Hypatia’s answers to students’ questions” I gave a passage that I was strongly tempted to reproduce here in full but in the end decided to give only the first three paragraphs:

“Is there mind in the cosmos, in the world we see around us? This is a question which only a fool would rush to answer confidently. Plato told us in the *Sophist* about the ongoing battle of the Gods and the Giants. The Giants would make even of the mind in us a phantom thing not worthy of being dignified with the title of reality. The Gods see mind as the root and source and ground of reality. Now, I am no goddess of course, but you all know that I side with the philosophical Gods. To my mind the notion of a thing, anything, existing apart from mind, is unintelligible. I cannot see how a thing that is not rooted in mind can be.

“But in what sense is there mind in things that we call material? In what sense is there mind in a rock, in a log of wood, in a manufactured article? These are intricate questions about which we can speculate endlessly. Here I would only explain that when I say that I cannot see how there can be anything apart from mind, I am not referring to mind as we habitually know it in ourselves. Mind as we habitually know it in ourselves is conditioned by the limitations and special circumstances of human life. And most manifestations of mind in our normal life and normal experience do not represent what we should see as most valuable or most real in us. Skill and shrewdness and even praiseworthy ingenuity are not what is best and happiest in us.

“But mind, or, as I prefer to say, intelligence, is to me an inseparable aspect of life, of creativity, of what is real. So, while I say that, theoretically, I cannot see how there can be a rock that is not grounded in mind, I yet confess that I have no notion as to how mind is related to the rock. But I can say with more confidence that I feel there is mind in a flower or a bee in the same sense as there is mind in our best moments of tranquility and of happiness. And I have to explain that when I speak of mind in the bee I do not mean the amazing abilities of the bee that put our best skills to shame, but I mean the intelligence inherent in its sheer vitality.”

I alluded at the beginning of this essay to the moral offshoot of philosophical materialism. But this essay is already longer than I intended, so I content myself with saying that, in my view, philosophical materialism is not free of blame for the culture of competitiveness and consumerism that holds that ‘goods’ are all the good in the world, a culture that is poisoning the whole of our human life.

Cairo, Egypt, January 17, 2014.

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

There are two problems covered by the rubric “problem of evil,” two problems which are quite distinct. Merging these two problems together causes endless confusion. The first concerns the evil encountered in human life, and though it is this that we can properly call evil, I would say that we do not face a philosophical problem here. The problem is practical; it is serious, grievous, onerous, but there is nothing mysterious about it. Human evil stems from ignorance, from stupidity, from needless clashes of interests and evaluations. These sources of evil can and must be addressed by patient and persistent efforts by women and men of goodwill. The task calls for Herculean stamina and Promethean endurance, but it can and must be undertaken, for if we say it is unfeasible we might as well call for the collective suicide of the human race. [In “The Mystery and the Riddle” (included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009, I offered some reflections, mainly on evil in human life.)]

The second problem we may designate as the metaphysical problem of evil. But before we delve into that, let us clear out some points. Is there evil in the universe, in the world, in nature? In nature we meet with catastrophes: earthquakes, storms, tsunamis, famines, epidemics. In nature we find animals devouring other animals; indeed, all life lives on other life. Worst

of all, we find the imperfection of the human race that causes what we referred to as evil properly so called.

At this juncture we need to tread carefully and try to see things clearly. In the first place, earthquakes, storms, volcanoes, are adjustments in the state of nature. They are only catastrophes for human beings; in themselves they are no more evil than a sneeze. Then, animals preying on animals, this is tragic (I will revert to the tragic further on) but if there is no intention to hurt, this too may be seen as a mode of natural adjustment. We destroy viruses and do not see that as evil. The deer devoured by the tiger suffers pain for a while and dies: the pain is tragic, the loss of life is tragic, but this is a natural necessity. I will come back later on to the notion of metaphysical necessity, though not necessarily under that name.

Let us once more put off the main metaphysical problem for a while to clear out a special version of the problem which we may call the theological problem of evil. If we suppose that the world has been created by an omnipotent and omniscient Creator we have need to ask: Why has It (the Creator) permitted so much pain and suffering, so much misery and sorrow, in the world? If we assume the Creator to be omniscient and omnipotent there is no way that we can exonerate It of all that: the evil would be evil in the will of the Creator. Zarathustrianism supposed there are two original powers ruling over the world, one good and one evil. This would be a possible way out theoretically. But in any case, the notion of a power or powers making or controlling the world from outside it is necessarily riddled with insurmountable difficulties.

If we reject the idea of a transcendent creator or of a power or powers controlling the world from outside of it, we are faced with Being as an ultimate mystery for which we cannot even ask for a cause. To ask how Being came about or why there is being rather than no-being—either of these questions is meaningless, it cannot be answered because, strictly, it cannot be formulated as a meaningful question.

We are faced with Being. But sheer blank Being, the Being of Aristotle after it has been abstracted to a completely bloodless, lifeless, motionless, colorless, strictly stale, sterile, barren nothing cannot be the source of our teeming, tumultuous, restless world. To be the source of the world we know, ultimate Being must be conceived as fertile, procreative, in a word, creative. But we see that all that is created passes away. Being cannot have actual presence except in ephemeral, transient beings that pass away as they come to be. That ultimate Being that we find in all the things that come to be and pass away but cannot be reduced to any particular being—that Being I call Reality and the beings that come to be and pass away I call existents.

So I conceive ultimate Being (Reality) as creative, or, more correctly, as creativity, that only has existence in finite, particular, vanishing actualities. Thus we have these first two ultimate principles, the Principle of Creativity and the Principle of Transience. But the ephemeral, vanishing actualities cannot be conceived to have being except under some Form that gives them unity and ideal (conceptual) permanence. These are the Forms of Plato. And this gives us our third metaphysical principle, the Principle of Integrity. Hence I say that we can only conceive of ultimate Reality—a Reality that we can think of as the fount and origin of our world—as multi-dimensional.

What bearing does this have on the problem of evil? First, on the plane of the universe, if all actual, finite existence is necessarily transient, then all existence is tragic. We are born to die. A song is sung, begins and ends, and can only attain its perfection in finishing. Death is tragic and sad, but it is not evil; life has meaning in its completion in a process the beginning of which is pregnant with the end. In Creative Reality there is tragedy but no evil: creativity is a perpetual affirmation of value. Borrowing the language of Christian theology we may say that Existence is the original sin that must be atoned for by perpetual death.

On the plane of human life, in creativity, in love, in generosity and sympathy and noble sacrifice, in the creativity of

art and the creativity of thought, human life is good and shares in the eternity of ultimate Reality. This is the Platonic ascension to the Form of the Good and this is human freedom as seen by Spinoza.

But in the life of the human race there are conflicts, struggle and enmity, hatred and selfishness and greed: all of this is evil; and there is pain and suffering willfully inflicted, and this is the most grievous evil. Socrates and Spinoza, the Buddha and the Stoics, all of them summed all of this as ignorance.

As far as we know, a human being is the only animal that thinks conceptually, or is the only animal that has taken conceptual thinking to a high level. Conceptual thinking enabled human beings to solve practical problems, to anticipate happenings, take advantage of observed regular occurrences in nature, invent tools, plan and organize, build civilizations, arrive at all the technological wizardry we are drowned in. At this point I have to remark marginally that I make a clear distinction between our conceptual thinking and the intelligence that is an essential aspect of creativity and also make a distinction between, on the one hand, the inventiveness resulting from conceptual thinking, and, on the other hand, what we may call creativity on the spiritual plane, in which I include moral acts as well as works of art and creative thought.

When conceptual thinking enabled human beings to break loose of the immediate present, it led them to have hopes and dreams and desires, and to create for themselves goals and values; they formed such notions as justice and loyalty and honor; they came to desire non-present goods; to dream of finery and luxury and riches; to crave power and mastery. These desires and attachments became jumbled, intertwined, entangled, confused and obscured, and the dream-world of one human being conflicted and clashed with the dream-worlds of other human beings. In short, human beings became too clever for their own good. They have come to have more cleverness than understanding. Now it is the task, the urgent task, of all intelligent women and men of goodwill to work to reverse this

sad state of affairs and lead human beings to have more understanding than cunning. The task is urgent because human beings, now over-crowded on their tiny planet, foolishly quarrelling and fighting, shortsightedly devastating the natural environment that gave them sustenance and gave them power, are rapidly and almost irreversibly hurtling towards self-destruction. The gravest danger to human beings—despite all their cleverness and their vaunted technological wizardry—is stupidity. Unless we have more understanding than cunning, we are doomed.

To sum up: No omniscient and omnipotent God is responsible for the world. To look up to such a God to save us is to deliver ourselves to our inevitable fate. In the universe, all existence is tragic, but there is no evil. In human life the evil is in the thoughts we have created in the first place to serve our purposes but then turned into monsters wielding tyrannical power over us. We have to realize that we can only save ourselves if we live in peace and harmony with our fellow human beings and with nature, and that true happiness for a human being is in good deeds, in love and generosity and sympathy and friendliness, and that the richest treasure for a human being is in creative activity, in producing beautiful works of art and thought. This is what Plato called giving birth in beauty.

In what I am saying here, if not in the theoretical matter, at any rate in the practical part, there is nothing new or original. This is what all moral teachers, from ancient Egyptian sages through Jesus of Nazareth to Gandhi and Schweitzer have been saying. But few of us can remove themselves for a while from the din and hubbub of our too-busy life to see the plain truth. It is the duty of all intelligent persons to spread the word: Human beings, be good or be annihilated!

Cairo, November 4, 2013.





## WHY SCIENCE WILL NOT FIND THE SOUL

I have written repeatedly, extensively, seriously on the reality of the soul and the reality of the mind. Few have heeded what I have been saying. Let me try this whimsical approach. If it fails to convince you, it may not fail to amuse you.

A scientist is perfectly right when she or he says that in all their investigations they have never met with a soul. But they are wrong when they go on to conclude that there is no soul.

I am. I know perfectly well what I mean when I say “I am,” and every human being can say “I am” and know perfectly well what she or he means. But no scientist can find “I,” neither my “I,” nor her or his “I,” nor anybody else’s “I.”

Descartes said, “Je pense, donc je suis.” That is needlessly roundabout. He should have said, “Je suis parce que je suis.” My I is the one indubitable, incontestable, ineradicable truth and reality that I know.

In truth I cannot say to anyone “You are,” intending the same thing as when I say “I am.” “You are,” with all due respect to grammarians, is not a sentence, is not, strictly, a meaningful

statement. It requires completion. “You are this entity that I see and hear and have dealings with.” To me you are you. I acknowledge that you have your “I” as I have my “I,” but I can never know your “I.” On ethical grounds I respect your “I.” On philosophical grounds I affirm your “I.” But as a scientist (supposing I am a scientist) I cannot find your “I.” In classing ‘am’ with the other members of the verb ‘to be’ grammarians were committing a metaphysical atrocity; they were placing a wolf in the sheep pen.

Why? My “I” is my inwardness. Your “I” is your inwardness. The creed and first principle of science is “outwardness,” or, in the language of science, objectivity. Science is subject to the command “Thou shalt not turn thy eye inwards lest thou lose thyself!”

The “I” that science cannot find has been called soul, mind, *psuchê*, *nous*, *atman* – what’s in a name? It is our reality, our whole reality and our whole worth.

In “Where Is I?” (an examination of Gilbert Ryle’s “Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts”), I opened the concluding section with these words: “Today, neuroscientists and philosophers of mind are like a child standing before a mirror, perplexedly saying, ‘Here is my nose, here are my eyes, here are my arms, ... but where is I?’”

Cairo, November 12, 2013.

## CAN A COMPUTER THINK?

**O**ur mighty scientists and technology wizards are too busy trying to make a thinking computer – too busy to give themselves pause to think and ask themselves the simple question about the difference between computation and thinking.

To think is to think creatively: not to solve a problem that has never been solved before, but to unravel a problem that has never been posed before.

Ever since the computer was first invented, technologists have been busy giving the computer greater and greater computational powers, that is, making machines that work according to more and more sophisticated rules, that can perhaps even mimic initiative, but that do not have the spontaneity that is inseparable of true subjectivity.

I do not consider it unreasonable to suppose that one day we might have a computer that will say, “I will have it thus!” But that will no longer be a machine but a person that has evolved out of its physical material, and while it will think, it will not think in obedience to the rules given it by its makers but creatively out of its own newly emergent inner reality, and though the technologists, as I see it, would have participated in occasioning the emergence of that person, they would not understand how it

came about. They would not understand that until they acknowledge that what gives It the ability to think is that mysterious inner reality that makes them persons and that gives them the ability to think.

We might one day make a Thinker, just as we might one day make a living organism from ‘lifeless’ matter, but in either case we will only have prodded Mother Nature to evolve in a short span of time what it had previously evolved over aeons.



Now our scientists are busy trying to make a brain. It is a daunting task but, theoretically, not an impossible one. So let us say they will make a brain, simulating every bit and every beat of the human brain. Will that brain think? What kind of thought will it think? Or let them take out the brain of a human being—a vigorous young person who has been fatally injured or one that has been sentenced to death—and keep it artificially supplied with nutrition and oxygen. Will that brain think? What kind of thought will it think? To my mind, what thinks in a living human being is not the brain but the whole person, the totality of the living person.



You are free to think that what I have written here is nonsense, but nevertheless you would be wise to stop a while and consider what grain of insight (I purposely refrain from using the word ‘truth’ here) might be in it – but please don’t feed it into a computer: the computer will only give you back what you make it give you back.

Cairo, May 22, 2013.

# SOCRATES, PLATO, AND SCIENCE

(First published in Philosophy Pathways Issue No.157,  
4 November, 2010)

In an important paper on “Plato’s Ideal of Science,” Professor Sigurdarson<sup>1</sup> undertakes to defend Plato against the charge that “he did more damage to science than good” as many scholars maintain. (Sigurdarson cites in particular B. Farrington and Olaf Pedersen.) The charge finds support in a short passage in *Republic* 530b6-c1 about the way Plato proposes astronomy should be studied:

“It is by means of problems, then, that we shall proceed in astronomy, in the same way as we do in geometry, and we shall let the things in the heavens alone if, by doing real astronomy, we are to turn from disuse to use that part of our soul whose nature it is to be wise (*to phusei phronimon en têi psuchêi*)” (tr. Vlastos 1980 as quoted by Sigurdarson).

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<sup>1</sup> Sigurdarson, Erikur Smari, “Plato’s Ideal of Science” in *Essays on Plato’s Republic*, ed. Erik Nis Ostenfeld, 1998.

I have neither competence nor desire to enter into the scholarly fray about Plato's approach to the study of astronomy, nor do I intend to comment on Sigurdarson's main argument which leads up to the conclusion that in *Republic* 530 b-c Socrates was not "talking about science as such but only about how some of the sciences can be used as tools to improve our souls and prepare them for the ultimate *telos*."

However, for some reason I cannot comprehend, before discussing the *Republic* passage, Sigurdarson speaks of the 'autobiography' passage of the *Phaedo*. I have in several of my writings discussed the *Phaedo* 'autobiography' passage<sup>2</sup>, 95e-101e, as I believe that its most important message has escaped students of philosophy with damaging consequences for philosophy. Now I find Sigurdarson's linkage of the *Phaedo* passage to the *Republic* passage strongly illustrative of the failure of mainstream philosophical thinking to absorb that crucial message.

Socrates' decision to take refuge in reasoning to examine there the reality of things that be (*eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tēn alêtheian*) was not an alternative method of 'inquiry into nature' (*peri phuseôs historia*) as Sigurdarson suggests, even though Socrates' ironical *tin' allon tropon autos eikêi phurô* ("muddle out a haphazard method of my own," Tredennick) may give that impression. Socrates' decision to seek *aitiai* in the realm of reason (*en logois*) and not in the world of actual things (*en ergois*), 100a, amounted to a separation of two modes of thought, a separation more radical and more consistent than Kant's.

Socrates renounced completely all inquiry into the things of the world outside the mind, not as unimportant or uncertain, but as totally unrelated to the questions that concerned him and that concern all philosophy proper, questions that deal with ideals and values "that do not reside in nature, but only in the mind of man,

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<sup>2</sup> Khashaba, D. R., "Philosophy as Prophecy" in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009; *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005, ch. 1, pp.24-26, and ch. 5, pp. 126-9.

in the sense that they do not come to us from outside, and can by no means be discovered by any objective approach.” It was not “a scientific method designed to give us knowledge about the world, but was a method designed to give us the only wisdom accessible to man: understanding of ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

It is thus misleading and confusing to link the *Phaedo* ‘autobiography’ passage to that of the *Republic* passage where Plato was speaking (albeit through ‘Socrates’) of ‘real astronomy’ as distinct from empirical astronomy. These do not pertain the one to philosophical thinking as understood by Socrates and the other to the inquiry into nature renounced by Socrates. These both relate to the ‘outer’ world, which, according to the Socrates of the ‘autobiography,’ lies outside the sphere of philosophy proper.

Although as a rule I shy away from trespassing into the realm of science, I will venture to suggest that Plato’s distinction between the two alternative approaches to the study of astronomy may perhaps be elucidated by comparing the approach of Galileo to that of Newton. Galileo experimented by dropping objects and invented the telescope to watch the planets and the stars. He came up with important empirical results. But it was the mathematician Newton who, proceeding on the lines of Plato’s ‘real astronomy,’ created the concept and the theory of gravity. Both approaches were scientific, both related to the ‘outer’ world and not to the ‘inner’ world that was the sole concern of Socrates and, in my view, of all philosophy proper; and Newton was wise enough to see clearly that gravity was nothing but an idea, a useful fiction, that enabled us to calculate and to predict the motion of things in the phenomenal world, but did not explain anything as our modern philosophers fondly believe.

I will not hesitate to re-affirm the foolish stance that I have already often maintained, namely, that our failure to acknowledge the radical distinction between philosophical thinking and scientific thinking is doing serious damage to philosophy. It is

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<sup>3</sup> Khashaba, D. R., *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, 2008, ch. 2, p.24, p.26.

not in the power of philosophy, and it is not the purpose of philosophy, to give us knowledge about the world, but to give us understanding of ourselves, an understanding of which our ailing humanity stands in dire need.



## UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE: a concept and a term we badly need

**L**ewis Mumford in *The Condition of Man* (1944) uses the term ‘idolum.’ In the short Glossary appended to the book he defines it thus:

“IDOLUM. This term was first used in *The Story of Utopias* (1922) at about the same time Mr. Walter Lippmann coined the expression ‘pseudo-environment’ for a similar fact. By idolum I do not mean either an idea or an idol: neither a concept nor a fetich nor an ideology. By idolum I indicate the existence of an ideological ‘field,’ which unites and polarizes, as it were, a number of related images, symbol, ideas, and even artifacts. Idolum is close to the German term *Weltbild* when taken in its literal sense: a picture of the world, that is, the world experienced in and through culture, that people carry in their minds. I prefer it to the term pseudo-environment because as such an idolum is neither fictitious nor false: it is simply the dominant mental environment of a particular culture, containing both permanently verifiable experiences and temporarily acceptable illusions.” (Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man*, 1944, Glossary.)

This is similar to a key concept that I have—in complete unawareness of either Mumford’s or Lippman’s term—been emphasizing in my writings under the term “universe of discourse.” Let me try to explain what I mean by this vital notion, and I hope the verbosity of this explanation may be excused because I feel it is necessary to make the idea as clear as possible.

From the start I insisted that for Socrates what characterizes human beings as such is that they live in a world of ideas and ideals that arise in the mind and that have no being except in the mind: desires, expectations, fears, anticipated pleasures and pains, socially or communally sanctioned values. A brute is moved by present pleasure, present pain, present desire, present dread, but only a human being is moved by ambition or vengeance or anticipated danger. A human being kills and dies for honour or for loyalty, things which have no being outside the human mind. A dog will fight another dog for a bone, but having its own bone it will not envy a neighboring dog its bigger bone. Human beings have these ‘ideal’ motives because they alone live in that intelligible realm that Socrates clearly and radically distinguished from the perceptible realm. Living in an intelligible realm that has no being outside the human mind is what characterizes human beings as such. That is the keystone of Socrates’ and Plato’s philosophy and of my version of Platonism. A person’s or a community’s particular intelligible realm is what I call that particular person’s or community’s universe of discourse.

Permit me to reproduce here a few excerpts from some of my writings illustrating my usage of this expression:

“Our language is our fate. Language shapes reality, the only reality we are capable of apprehending. In language we form our universe of discourse, and that universe defines the limits of intelligibility for us. We can discard our language and adopt another—mathematical, physical, mythical, what you will – our understanding would still be drawing breath and getting its lifeblood from an ideal

universe of discourse.” (*Let Us Philosophize*, second ed., 2008, Ch. VII, “Knowledge of the World.”)

“... a philosophy creates a universe of discourse which brings into being a domain of intelligibility in which the mind can have its proper life as active, creative intelligence.” (*Plato: An Interpretation*. 2005, Introduction.)

“A word has meaning for each mind only in the particular universe of discourse which is the life of that mind.” (*Plato: An Interpretation* ,2005, Ch. VII, “The Argument of the *Republic*.”)

“Our ideas constitute the intelligible world we live in. Any system of ideas constitutes a particular universe of discourse. When Socrates says, ‘I would rather suffer wrong than do wrong,’ this statement is neither analytic nor verifiable. It is creative; it gives us a meaningful world in which we live on a new plane of being. (“Philosophy as Prophecy,” *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009.)

Mumford’s phrase “the world experienced in and through culture, that people carry in their minds” sums the notion succinctly. Mumford prefers ‘idolum’ to Lippmann’s ‘pseudo-environment.’ I do not find ‘idolum’ satisfactory. Lippmann’s ‘pseudo-environment’ would be closer to what is needed if altered to ‘virtual environment.’ But I still prefer my ‘universe of discourse.’

The culture “that people carry in their minds” is a person’s or a people’s private reality; it determines what reality the outer things have for that person or that people. And that, in Plato’s philosophy and in my philosophy, is all the reality there is. All else is either dumb sensation–Kant’s blind intuitions without concepts–or it is a mental construct that Whitehead castigated in his treatment of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

A universe of discourse is the world in which we live our characteristically human life. It is the only world with which philosophy proper is concerned. Science and the methods of objective science are designed for dealing with the outer world, the phenomenal world; they have no applicability in the intelligible world, which is the proper domain of philosophy. The confounding of science and philosophy, harmful to both, is an error that I have been combating in all my writings.

Cairo, Egypt, January 14, 2014.

## WHO IS A PHILOSOPHER?

Who is a philosopher? Or better: What is a philosopher? The ‘Who’ question can be answered in the silly manner of Hippias when Socrates asks him: “What is beauty?” and he answers: “A beautiful girl is beauty.” The question looks deceptively simple. To appreciate to what profound depths it can draw us we have only to consider that the core of the greatest philosophy book ever written, Plato’s *Republic*, was no more than an attempt to answer that question. Somewhere in *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, 2008, I have said that the whole body of a philosopher’s work is that particular philosopher’s answer to the question: What is philosophy?

On a naïve plane we may say that we have two different classes that claim the title “philosopher.” In the first class a philosopher is one who has studied the works of the great thinkers of the past and who may teach the gist of those works in a school or a university. Properly we should say that she or he has studied the history of philosophy and teaches the history of philosophy.

In the second class a philosopher is one who has been haunted by the questions that have irked human beings about the nature and meaning and purpose of the world and of life ever since they acquired the faculty of reflective thinking. She or he has then searched within

her or his own soul (mind) for answers to those questions. When a person thinks that she or he has found the answer to the question that person is no longer a philosopher or that question was not a properly philosophical question in the first place. A philosophical question can never be answered but can only be and should only be endlessly explored. That endless exploration is the proper life of the soul (mind). Voltaire's dictum, *Aimer et penser: c'est la véritable vie des esprits*, is just but to understand it properly we have to realize that 'aimer' and 'penser' are one thing for a truly living soul (mind).

In the present state of things, members of the second class are rarely found in academic circles. They are mostly independent philosophers. They may or may not write books or essays of the kind commonly classified as works of philosophy. They may express the outflow of their inner explorations in poetry or fiction or in music. Those are the more fortunate ones and they are the ones that constantly enrich human culture and help humans preserve their humanity. The less fortunate—truly unfortunate—ones that can only express themselves in the language of abstract conceptual thinking live and die unrecognized. The fruits of their explorations are not allowed to reach the mainstream of human culture.

I am reading one of the most insightful works of the twentieth century, Lewis Mumford's *The Condition of Man* (1944). I pick up this sentence from the Introduction: "We must capture once more the sense of what it is to be a man: we must fashion a fresh way of life, which will give to every man a new value and meaning in his daily activities." What has the whole of our present academic philosophy, the whole body of our analytical philosophy, to contribute to this task that is still desperately needed? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

I began this essay in a reflective mood. I ended in a mood of barely suppressed anger. Let me give my anger vent. There is no greater killer of true philosophy than academic philosophy and there is no greater enemy of independent philosophy than the peer-review system of philosophical journals.

Sixth-October City, Egypt, January 3, 2014.

## CREATIVITY AND MORALITY

Creativity, it has been said, is unrelated to morality. Like every general statement, this is a mixture of truth and falsehood. What would be asserted to be true in it is obvious. Anyone can recount endless instances in illustration. It is the untruth in the statement that is harder to uncover.

To uncover the core of genuine truth hidden under the veneer of delusive truth, let us first try to be clear about what we mean by ‘creativity’ and what we mean by ‘morality.’

To explain what I understand by ‘creativity’ I distinguish between two modes of what is commonly known as intelligence. There is intelligence as the power of thought involved in problem-solving and in inventiveness. This is of immeasurable practical importance and we all know that its exercise can issue in good or in evil; perhaps more often in evil than in good. Marginally, let me say that here, even when thought issues in evil, the evil is evil from the perspective of a world-view that aims at higher or more comprehensive good, but from the point of view of the doer, the deed must aim at some ‘good’ narrowly conceived. (This is the gist of Socrates’ argument in the *Protagoras* concerning the notion of *akrasia*.) The other mode of intelligence (and this is what, in my opinion, is properly to be

named intelligence) is not fundamentally related to thinking: it is a feeling for life and beauty and the experiences that enrich and beautify life.

What are we to understand by ‘morality’? Again let us distinguish between two things. We all know that there are codes of morality which are forged in the course of time and which in greater or lesser measure differ from society to society and from generation to generation. We know that some precepts incorporated in these codes are simply bad. Whether there is or there is not a quintessence that can be extracted from these varied and varying codes is a question we need not delve into here. Then there is the morality we all know in ourselves when we lend a helping hand, when we risk our life to snatch a little child from the way of a speeding car, when we feel disgust at the meanness of one who takes advantage of the weakness of a contestant. Let us call this spontaneous morality.

In my view, genuine creativity issues from intelligence as feeling for life and beauty wedded to spontaneous morality. But our human life is never simple and the best of us humans are shrouded in confusions, filled with conflicting aims and purposes, burdened by divergent interests, driven by unreconciled ideals and values.



The phrase I began with at the top of this essay I had picked up from a note in *aldaily.com* introducing a review article by Seamus Perry: [http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/perry\\_11\\_13.php](http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/perry_11_13.php). Following an inveterate habit of mine, I jotted down the above reflections before looking at the article. I will now read Seamus Perry’s article and see if I have anything to add.

The article reviews *The Vampire Family: Passion, Envy and the Curse of Byron* by Andrew McConnell. The reviewer and the book reviewed have much to say on the misery both Shelley and Byron caused the unfortunate women who came their way. This



raises a problem. We might ask: Is an immoral artist's work necessarily immoral?

It is only very rarely that anyone of us human beings is a simple, well-integrated personality. If you ever meet with a simple, well-integrated personality, that will most probably not be a person of genius or renown or rank but a simple woman or man leading a simple life. Indeed, an integrated personality is just what a good human being strives all her or his life to achieve, and the best of us only falteringly and intermittently approach that goal. But the happy ones among us sinful human beings know that within us there is something good that we seek to be true to. And it is that inner good that is the fount of the creativity of the genuine poet or artist.

When Shelley makes Prometheus cry in agony, "It doth repent me ... I wish no living thing to suffer pain," he must have been voicing a deeply-experienced personal agony.

Reverting to the statement with which we began, I affirm that creativity and morality are two sides of the same coin and that good art can only be in harmony with good morals. An "immoral" artist leads the life influenced and formed by her or his upbringing, circumstances, experiences, sufferings, pressures, and whatnot; but her or his art springs from a deeper fount.

Seamus Perry does well when, at the end of his review, he sums up the failings of Shelly and Byron as "a sequence of human ineptitudes, some well meant and more motivated by misplaced principle than by cruelty."

Cairo, November 14, 2013.



## HAS HUMANITY PROGRESSED?

**H**as there been progress in humanity during, let us say, the last three millennia? Of course it all depends on what we mean by progress and what we mean by humanity. So if you don't find yourself in agreement with what I will be saying, let us not quarrel, for we will be speaking about different things. In any case, I will not attempt to give a direct or definite answer to the question but will be, as it were, reconnoitering around its terms.

First, why the last three millennia? Because this is the period for which we have good records and that we can confidently compare with our condition in the present time.

Let us take an average man (to introduce women at this point would complicate the issue), living in one of the advanced countries of our present-day world, under fairly fortunate conditions, and ask, is the quality of life of such a man better than the quality of life of say, an Egyptian man living in one of the more peaceful and fairly prosperous periods of Egyptian history? Taking as criteria family life, filial and parental love, brotherly and sisterly sentiment, neighborly goodwill, opportunities for enjoyment of beauty and the normal healthy exercise of both body and mind, I do not think we can say that the one is superior

to the other. (Taking shorter successive periods of time there will be found ups and downs; this only clouds the larger issue.)

Admittedly there has been advance in the treatment of disease, but perhaps this has been offset by the appearance of new ailments, and the harm that we have been inflicting on our natural environment probably has its toll. Can anyone confidently assert that the average present-day European or American citizen enjoys better health than the average Hellene in the millennium preceding the Christian era?

As recently as two-hundred years ago there was slavery all over the advanced and half-advanced countries. Here we can say we have taken a step forward. But only about a hundred years ago the condition of the working class in England was perhaps more pitiable than the average condition of slaves in classical Greece or Rome. More telling, present-day conditions in large populations in many parts of the world are miserable, and we cannot honestly say that this is unrelated to the economic system ruling in the advanced countries.

The poverty, suffering, and misery of very large sectors of humankind is a disgrace for present-day humanity. I do not claim to have knowledge of ancient conditions worldwide, but I will venture to suggest that the ancient world could be divided into, on the one hand, the centers of old civilizations, such as China, India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, etc., and, on the other hand, peoples who remained in primitive or near-primitive conditions. In the civilized countries, apart from slaves, people lived fairly well. In the more primitive areas people lived in tribes or clans leading a fairly satisfactory life.

In one respect I would assert that there has definitely been progress. The idea of a common humanity has been advancing and spreading albeit at a very slow pace. Today most of us acknowledge it in theory. Our political leaders pay it lip-service. Yet in practice the policies of the advanced and half-advanced countries are self-centered, selfish and discriminatory; and on the level of individuals, only a Mother Teresa or a Gandhi or a

Schweitzer have seen all humans as simply that, humans; most of us need an effort to regard humankind as a family.

One might ask: What about the stupendous advance in science and technology? All of that may have been necessary to make it possible for the seven billion members of the human race to subsist on our tiny planet. All of that may have made certain things easier for us. It may also have made our life more complicated and, at least in certain ways, more burdensome and less lively. I think we would be deceiving ourselves if we said it has improved the quality of human life.

I would gladly trade my life for the life of a simple Athenian contemporary of Sophocles.

Cairo, November 10, 2013

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## SCIENCE, THEOLOGY, AND PHILOSOPHY

[Going through some forgotten material on my computer, I found the following piece which apparently I had written to post as a comment on “Philosophy Lives: Why Stephen Hawking’s attempt to banish natural theology only shows why we need it” by John Haldane, in *First Things*, January 2011 issue: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/12/philosophy-lives>]

**T**his is another example of the interminable feud between theology and science in which philosophy is victimized by both sides. Obedient to my inveterate habit, I put down my raw comments as I read.

In the opening lines of his article, Professor John Haldane quotes a sentence from *The Grand Design* by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow which encapsulates the misconception under which all empiricists labor in their approach to philosophy. Apparently the authors of *The Grand Design* maintain that philosophy is dead since it has “not kept up with modern developments in science.” Some twenty-five centuries ago Socrates answered that objection, but it seems that the simple

truth that Socrates spoke out in plain words was too simple to be taken in by highly sophisticated minds. Science and philosophy, Socrates found out, set themselves questions that are not only different, but are of two radically different kinds, so that no answers arrived at by scientific methods can answer a philosophical question. It should follow from this that philosophy has nothing to learn from science and whether it does or does not keep up “with modern developments in science” that can have no effect whatever on philosophy.

But we may find some excuse for scientists in their assault on philosophy when theologians, masquerading as philosophers, confidently give answers to questions that can only be dealt with by the methods of science. Let us now see how Professor Haldane rebuts Hawking’s and Mlodinow’s contention about philosophy, which Haldane seems to equate with natural theology.

To speak of ‘spontaneous creation’ as “the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the Universe exists, why we exist,” is strictly nonsensical. It empties ‘reason’ and ‘why’ completely of meaning. In what sense is spontaneous creation the ‘reason’ for existence? How does it tell us ‘why’ there is something? That there is something rather than nothing is, to my mind, an ultimate mystery that we can only stand before in awe. But we may take ‘spontaneous creation’ not as the ‘reason’ or the ‘why,’ but as an ultimate principle, itself a mystery, that we have simply to acknowledge. That is exactly what I do in my philosophy: I call it the Principle of Creativity. But Haldane’s natural theology does not have the humility to confess the mystery a mystery. There must be a God who created the universe out of nothing; and to the five-year-old’s question, “And who created God?,” there is no answer, and God turns out to be no better than the scientists’ ‘law of gravity’ that apparently was before there was anything to gravitate.

I will not comment on Haldane’s discussion of details in Hawking’s and Mlodinow’s argument, because it would not be right to critique these at second hand. But when Haldane states



that the universe's "inexplicable regularity will have an adequate explanation if it derives from the purposes of an agent," I permit myself to say that, although we may say—and I do say—that we only find the processes of the universe intelligible when we picture them as purposive, because that is how we find our own activity intelligible, yet that does not justify our asserting that there is actually an agent—and that outside the universe—whose purposes explain the processes of the universe. A purposiveness that I know in myself and the concept of which makes natural things intelligible to me is one thing; but "a transcendent cause outside of the universe" is quite another thing.

The idea of "multiple universes aris[ing] naturally from physical law"—a physical law that apparently had the power to create when it itself had no actual existence—and the idea of a transcendent God that suddenly had the whim to create the universe out of nothing – I find both these equally fantastic and equally hubristic, because they amount simply to our unwillingness to confess our ignorance.

If we were to ask Socrates what he thought of all this, he would repeat the words he gave when asked what he thought of the traditional tales about the gods: "I have no leisure for such inquiries ... I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous" (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229e-230a, tr. Jowett). That is the sole concern of philosophy, to try to understand what is of importance to us in our character as human beings. It is the absence of this kind of philosophy that is plunging humankind in barbarism, a barbarism armed with all the achievements of science and technology and with all the sophistications of our prolific theologies.

January 5, 2011.



SCRAPS



## REASON AND RATIONALITY

I know that what I mean to say here I have already said many times before and I think I will be saying it again and again, because, though it is very simple, many clever people seem to find it very hard to absorb.

Whitehead has pointed out that it is wrong to think that modern science and modern philosophy have been founded on reason and reasoning. It was Scholasticism that was based completely and consistently on reasoning. If you begin with any primary statement given as true, then by strictly valid logical reasoning you can establish any conclusions you desire. This is done by wittingly or unwittingly giving modified meanings to the terms of the statement. The distinctive character of modern science and modern philosophy was not reliance on reason for reaching conclusions but working with reason as a tool to winnow and sift and test given presuppositions and assumptions. For modern science and philosophy reason has been demoted from master to servant.

In a moving episode of the *Phaedo* drama, Socrates warns against ‘misology’ or loss of faith in reason. Allow me to reproduce the following paragraph from my *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), Chapter V, “The Meaning of the *Phaedo*”:

“The atmosphere of dejection and loss of heart depicted following the objections of Simmias and Cebes and Socrates’ cautioning against misology are an integral part of the total picture. If Plato had thought there were room for certainty in philosophical thinking, this episode would have been of little value. Against the background of the admitted inconclusiveness of all the arguments advanced, the warning against misology highlights the question as to the possibility and utility of rationalism. If we are convinced that reason cannot yield incontestable truth, then we are naturally disposed to ask, What use is it to follow reason? The answer of Socrates and of Plato is that our worth as human beings resides in the exercise of reason, and if all truths proposed by human beings are necessarily half-truths, we are not therefore obliged to rest in these half-truths: our intellectual integrity and our human dignity demand that we always see our half-truths for what they are. Faced with the insufficiency of discursive thinking, Plato opts neither for the imbecility of Pascal nor for the despair of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein. If we cannot have definitive truths, let us clothe our insights in myths, provided that we be always prepared to shatter our own myths.”

I would say that the same thought I am advancing here is behind Kant’s examination of the ‘Antinomies of Pure Reason’ in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, whose lessons, I maintain, theologians, scientists, and philosophers have not yet sufficiently absorbed.

The product of reasoning may give us wealth, power, and comfort, or may lead to the contrary of all that; but it is in the creative activity of exercising reason, in the never-ceasing and never-ending act of reasoning that ever destroys its grounds and ever builds them anew, that we are truly human and live truly human lives. That is rationality as distinct from dogmatic rationalism.

Cairo, June 8, 2013.

## COMMENT

**B**y a fortunate chance I found that I had commented on an article by A C Grayling in New Statesman on 09 April 2009. Here's what I wrote:

Granted that the doctrines of religions “have their roots in the superstitions and fancies” of persons who lived long ago. We have to discard those superstitions. But those superstitions grew out of a compelling urge to answer certain questions. And if we throw away the questions along with the fanciful answers, we end up with a poorer, shallower *Weltanschauung*. I admit that those questions cannot have definitive answers: neither empirical science nor pure reason can provide those answers. Ask Kant. So, shall we give up? No!

Religion is a “man-made phenomenon,” but it is equally a man-making phenomenon. Those old superstition-mongers were seeking a meaning to their world. They were wrong in thinking they were finding that meaning in the world, but they were wiser than they knew in putting meaning into the world. We must keep puzzling about ultimate reasons, meanings, values, and keep creating myths about all that. Plato is the greatest philosopher because he gave no answers but made myths that keep the wonder and the puzzlement alive.

By all means pull down the edifices of dogmatic religions, but don't tell me to live in a wasteland. Leave me the metaphysical dimension, Spinoza's God-or-Nature, Schopenhauer's Will and Idea, Whitehead's organic vision of process: these are all myths, but they are myths that enable me to live in a rich, meaningful world, albeit a world that I know to be of our own making.

Plato spoke of a battle of Gods and Giants. What is wrong with the war waged by atheists against religion is that the atheism they advocate is equated with a narrow empiricism: they want us to accept the limits of objective science as the limits of all thought. I want to live in a meaningful world, and meaning is not to be found in the world but is only to be infused into the world by creative thought, by poetry, art, and a philosophy that dares to wrestle with ultimate, unanswerable questions.



## A FRAGMENT

**T**he NewStatesman carried a review article by John Gray on: *The Age of Nothing: How We sought to Live Since the Death of God* by Peter Watson and *Culture and the Death of God* by Terry Eagleton <http://www.newstatesman.com/> I tried to post the following short comment but failed. Here it is:

Is it true to say that science has revealed “a world with no inherent order or meaning”? Science could find no order or meaning in the world because the methods of science are not designed to ...find order or meaning. The confusion goes back to Hume and to perpetrate it is to ignore Kant. Science, as science, cannot support a “there is no x” proposition; it cannot even say, “There is no god.”

I would say that we cannot truly assert of Nietzsche that he was an atheist. Nietzsche had no metaphysics and atheism poses as a metaphysical position. Nietzsche was a cultural critic and his achievement was to re-affirm the simple truth that all meaning and all value are a creation of the human mind.



# ATHEISM

[I found this note in a nook on my laptop. I don't remember what I intended to do with it when I wrote it or why I neglected it. Anyhow, here it is for what it is worth.]

**M**y friends find my position with regard to atheism difficult to comprehend although I have in many of my writings tried to make it plain.

I am wholly on the side of atheists in their rejection of the idea of a personal god, a transcendent god, or a creator apart from the world he or she created. But I cannot go along with my atheist friends when they reduce all reality to the stuff of the objective world by whatever name we may call it. (Of course old Matter is more dead than Nietzsche's god.)

In the first place, I am wholly with Kant in holding that all we know of the objective world is confined to the appearances presented in our perceptions. We can know nothing of any reality beyond, behind, above, or at the beginning or origin of the phenomena. (I maintain that Socrates had anticipated Kant in this.) This should have silenced not only theologians and dogmatic metaphysicians but also and more importantly those

scientists who think they can discover the origin of the world. Scientists can and will eventually give us a reasonable account, a good account, of how our cosmos came to be. But whatever the cosmos came out of had to be before it gave being to the cosmos. That beginning before all beginning is outside the jurisdiction of human reason or pure reason in Kant's terminology.

Philosophy proper is not concerned with all of that. All of that is a world of shadows as Plato said. Philosophy is concerned with our inner reality, with the realities of our dreams and values and creative ideas. It is these that constitute our characteristically human life.

Among those creative ideas is the idea of God, an idea that has played and continues to play an important role in the inner life of human beings. That God idea, what Plato called the Form of the Good, does not represent or stand for an actual thing in the outer world. The God idea, the Form of the Good, is a myth in which we clothe our insight into our inner reality, because we cannot otherwise give utterance to that inner reality.

It is that valuable God idea, that all-valuable insight into my inner reality, that my atheist friends want to deprive me of.

Cairo, June 11, 2013

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## DOES GOD SEE THE TREE IN THE QUAD?

Craig French posted on Twitter @craigfrench the well-known limerick purportedly summing up Berkeley's *esse est percipi* doctrine. Perhaps George Berkeley himself might have passed the clever limerick as a fair representation of his view. But I think it misses something. I would say that God only sees the tree when I am there, or when the good Bishop is there. When no human being is there God does not see the tree I see. He sees the dance of energy waves or more probably he has in his mind only a mathematical equation. When I am there, God sees my sensual perception of the tree: the roundness of the trunk, the spread of the branches, the greenness of the leaves. When I am not there all of these, as Berkeley should maintain, have no being and therefore God would have no cause to see them.



## A MARGINAL NOTE ON PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

Not one of the dialogues of Plato has one sole purpose or one sole theme, not even the *Apology* or the *Crito*. As a Rembrandt portrait is as much a study of personality as a study of the aesthetic interplay of light and shade, so in a dialogue of Plato the drama and the thought work not side by side but each in and through each.

In “The Argument of the *Republic*” (Chapter VII of *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005) I downplayed the political character of the *Republic* in reaction to the position of scholars who see nothing in the *Republic* but a political treatise. They comment on the book and criticize it as if they were discussing the electoral program of a US presidential candidate. They show not a whit of historical sense. They do not take into consideration that while Plato's moral and metaphysical philosophy is the fruit of his insight, his politics is the product of his time and historical circumstances. Lewis Mumford in *The Condition of Man* (1944), Ch. I, Sect. 4, gives an insightful and judicious critique that any serious reader will find amply rewarding.

My own position was and is that whatever may have been Plato's motive or overriding interest in composing the *Republic*,

we have in its central part, the profoundest and maturest expression of Plato's philosophy and the quintessence of all philosophy. These seventy-odd pages, from 472 in Book V to the end of Book VII, are the lasting gift of Plato's inspiration to humanity.



## THOUGHTS EVOKED BY A WORD

“**T**he computers of some famous observatory may have made an unprecedented error ...” This sentence was written by A. N. Whitehead in 1927. What “computers” was he referring to? What did the word “computer” mean in 1927? Obviously the word had its simple basic meaning: machines that perform operations of computation. We know that such machines were in use centuries ago. Pascal made an ingenious calculating machine in the seventeenth century and there may have been more primitive ‘computers’ before that. But it would be interesting to know just what kind of computers Whitehead was referring to.

Now to another train of thought, though this will involve me in a shameful confession. When I first read that sentence some years ago I was baffled. I supposed the word must have its current meaning and started asking: When was the first computer made? As a man whose business is daily to make use of the tool of language I should not have been oblivious, even for a moment, to the fact that a word has a life history no less than a human being. My excuse is that although I had some idea of the use of calculators before our times, I don’t recall having seen them referred to by any term other than ‘machines.’ The word “computers” in Whitehead’s sentence took me by surprise.

This leads to another inquiry, linguistic this time. What was the first recorded use of the word ‘computer’ for a calculating machine?

Interesting as all this may be, the moral of my little tale is: Beware of the trap of words.

18 August 2013

## SARTRE'S "EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE"

Sartre's "existence precedes essence" was perhaps a good battle cry against much deluded "idealism," but it is, in my opinion, bad metaphysics, or rather, impossible metaphysics. There can be no existence not characterized by some form, no 'this' devoid of 'such' as Plato would say; unless it be that bare notion of bare 'being' that means nothing and is nothing.